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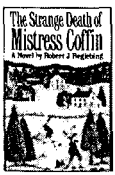

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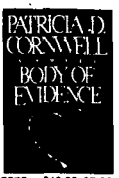

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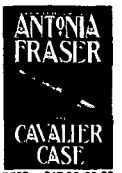

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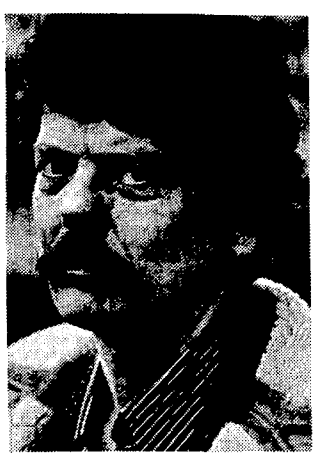

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ISSUE #591—DEDICATED TO GEORGE BAXT, JAMES POWELL, AND JACK RITCHIE

We'd like to ask for a moment of silence (interrupted by a resounding raspberry) to pay tribute to those of our writers who specialize in getting laughs out of mayhem and death. Their M.O.s may vary (Mr. Baxt riddles his short fiction with searing one-liners, Mr. Powell seasons his work with topsy-turvy fantasy, and the late great Jack Ritchie wrote with tongue firmly in cheek), but their results always slay us . . .

I HATE LUCY

by GEORGE BAXT

It was just like the good old days, being wined and dined and flirted with at Spego's restaurant. The past five years, like her three recent lovers, hadn't been good to Lucy Crewe. It was five years since the cancellation of her television series, *Give It to Martha*, and little was offered her except the occasional dinner-theater engagement in *Born Yesterday*. Her agent, Marvin Kominski, had been sympathetic, albeit unproductive. "It's your type, honeybunch. The giddy peroxide-blonde is deader than Brooke Shields."

"I'm a natural blonde!" she said, struggling to retain some composure. "And I'm a very good actress. I was in three Broadway hits before I agreed to do the series."

"It made you very rich, honeycake. Thirty thou a pop ain't jellybeans. You saved some of it, didn't you?"

She smiled. He took the smile to mean she was a financial wizard. She smiled to keep from bursting into tears. Poor Marvin. At least he wasn't avoiding her. (She wondered why so many Hollywood agents were named Marvin. She hungered to be introduced to a Beauregard or a Stanislaus. She'd probably have to go to Hungary to meet a Stanislaus.) He returned her phone calls fairly promptly.

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Now he was buying her lunch—deductible, she was sure.

"Honeymelon, have you thought of going back to Broadway?"

"What Broadway?" Her New York agent was as discouraging as a gun pointed at her head.

Marvin sighed like a defrocked rabbi and torched a cigar. "I'll try harder for you, honeybeets. I really will. Why don't you order a fattening dessert? You look anorexic."

That was three months ago. Now she was in Spego's with Herbert Fless, one of Hollywood's most successful real-estate agents. He owned a twenty-eight-room mansion in Bel Air, a nineteen-room house in the Malibu Colony, a twelve-room chalet in Klosters, and was the father of a spirited daughter named Juanita by her deceased mother, Consuela. He had bank accounts in Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Hong Kong, Nassau, and the Dime Savings in Brooklyn. Lucy wanted to pinch herself with joy at having met Herbert at Marvin Kominski's New Year's Eve party. (Yes, Marvin didn't abandon her on New Year's Eve, which is why everybody, even those who despised him, referred to him as "Good old Marvin.")

Herbert was saying, while his lobster bisque cooled and his ardor heated up, "I'm so lucky you were at good old Marvin's New Year's Eve. I was having an awful time until you arrived." She smiled and wrinkled her nose, then stopped when she remembered it wrinkled the skin around her eyes.

She said softly, cooing, "When I saw you leaning against the baby grand, holding up good old Marvin, my heart skipped a beat." She added with lust, "And it's still skipping and skipping—"

"Hush," he whispered. "I want to treasure this moment." He watched soap operas on the TV set in his office. "I watched your show religiously. That's when I first fell in love with you." He chuckled. "My poor Consuela used to tease me mercilessly." He shook his head sadly. "She died a dreadful death."

"Are there wonderful deaths?"

He reached to cover her hand. "You're so witty. Lucy, will you be my second wife?"

Jackpot! she said to herself. To him she said, "Do you think I'm worthy of your love?"

"Oh, my darling Lucy, I should be saying that to you."

"What about Juanita? Do you think I'll be an acceptable stepmother to your tempestuous daughter?"

"She's twenty-two, for crying out loud. She doesn't need a stepmother, she needs obedience school."

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"Is she as wild as they say she is?"

"She has her mother's gypsy and Indian blood in her. There were days when I thought I should buy her a tambourine."

"Was Consuela a wild one?"

He stared away from her and watched a woman drip spaghetti sauce over her terrifying bosom. "I was very young when I met and married Consuela. She was a flamenco dancer and snarled a lot. But what beauty! Unbelievable!"

His eyes were back on Lucy's face. "Not your kind of beauty. Patrician. Virginal." He didn't hear Lucy gulp. "Consuela was all fire and flames. Who would have dreamt twenty-four years ago that she'd be consumed by that dreaded disease? I must tell you the truth. A few months prior to her illness, Consuela and I were no longer in love. She met a young surfer outside our Malibu Colony mansion and I met Donald Trump. She had an affair, I invested in Trump."

"How long did the affair last?"

"Until the surfer met Juanita. That didn't last long, either. He drowned. Poetic justice. Oh, Lucy, marry me! Please marry me. Give me one last shot at happiness. I have so much money."

It took great self-control for Lucy to refrain from clapping her hands. She squeezed his hand gently. "Herbert, I'm the luckiest former star in the world."

Although slightly past forty, this was Lucy's first marriage and she chose to wear white. It was a stunning wedding, with over a thousand guests invited to the reception. Juanita wore a strapless red-and-gold gown with a bare midriff and a slit up the side that ended at her hips. It was very sexy, provocative, and tasteless. She spent the entire afternoon comparing Lucy to Consuela most unfavorably, and when tired of bitching she tried to seduce Kevin Costner when he expressed interest in her Indian blood. Good old Marvin Kominski tried to seduce Juanita, but she laughed cruelly at him, even when he drank champagne from her toeless slipper.

The honeymoon was sheer bliss. London, Paris, Vienna, the Taj Mahal by moonlight, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and the Chicago Loop. Lucy moved comfortably and easily into the Bel Air mansion. Within a few days, the household staff knew who was boss, and respected Lucy's no-nonsense attitude toward her own and her husband's comfort. It was only a matter of weeks when hot-headed Juanita took the hint and moved into her own pad in West Hollywood, where she drove the neighbors mad playing New Kids on the

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Block tapes until the wee small hours of the morning.

Lucy and Herbert entertained at dinner twice a week, and Lucy took up bridge and had the girls over at least once a week for a game. At one of the bridge afternoons, Antoinette Farthingill, a London emigre by way of Macao who had made a fortune in white slavery, asked Lucy, "My dear, how do you keep that gorgeous figure? Aerobics?"

Lucy laughed the tinkling laugh she reserved for her woman acquaintances. "I don't do anything. I eat what I like and drink what I like. Oh, sometimes I drive out to the Malibu house and take long walks on the beach. I swim occasionally, but there's so much pollution in the water, you know?"

Antoinette then asked, while looking at her bridge partner, a former nun who broke an ankle when she jumped over the wall and now walked with an exaggerated limp, "Aren't you interested in tennis? Out here, tennis is a cottage industry."

"Well, actually," said Lucy as she tabled her cards and claimed a small slam, much to her partner's delight, "I've been watching a lot of tennis on the tube and I've been wondering about lessons. It's such a graceful game. Do you think I have the right frame for tennis?"

"My dear Lucy," said Antoinette, "you have the right frame for anything you put your mind to. I know a great tennis pro." The other two players exchanged looks. Antoinette disapproved of happy marriages. "He taught me the game. Gilbert Traylor. He's coming to Sunday brunch this weekend. Why don't you and Herbert join us?"

"Herbert's leaving for New York in the morning. All that awful mess involving Donald Trump. I'll simply never understand high finance. Which is why I don't have a sou of my own. Is it all right if I come by myself?"

Even better, thought Antoinette. She said, "But, of course, darling."

Lucy's partner, Ada Warner, asked her, "When you were last in New York, did you meet Ivana?"

"As a matter of fact, quite by accident one afternoon at Mortimer's."

"What did you think of her?"

Lucy said sweetly, "What can I say? The lady is a Trump."

That night at dinner, Herbert asked Lucy, "You seem displeased—what's wrong?"

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Lucy pushed her plate of singed kidneys aside and said, "We've been married over a year now, Herbert. I know the honeymoon can't last forever, but you've been so cool and distant to me lately. We hardly ever make love. And you question every dollar I spend."

"You spend an awful lot of dollars."

"But when we were first married, you encouraged me to!"

"That was over a year ago. Now there's a recession. We've got to reef our sails and tighten our belts and do things with leftovers."

"But you just bought yourself a new Lear jet!"

"They gave me a rate. And another thing, you're not very nice to Juanita."

Lucy bristled. "Now really, Herbert! All those poison-pen letters cut out of newspapers! Those obscene phone calls at three in the morning! Sneaking into the house at night and tacking a dead bird to my door! The girl should be institutionalized."

"She misses her mother."

"My eye. She can't even spell her name."

Herbert slammed his hand on the table. "I want you to try and be nice to her. She's having a terrible time. Her cocaine dealer was shot to death in the Hasta Mañana disco. She's all broken up."

"She should take up a sport!"

"Why should she? You don't."

"I'm thinking of taking tennis lessons. Would that bankrupt you?"

"Not if you manage it on your household allowance."

"I could file Chapter Eleven on my household allowance."

"Your irony does not escape me."

That night, alone in her bedroom and meditating, Lucy wondered why she had signed a pre-nuptial agreement. The words "separate" and "divorce" now took precedence in her silent vocabulary, but to leave Herbert was unthinkable. She'd be penniless. Although there was always lawyer Martin Mitchelson to possibly remedy and improve that situation. "Oh God," she cried to the empty room, "there must be a solution to my dreadful situation!" She sat at her dressing table and admired her reflection. "Fiddle dee dee—" she blew herself a kiss "—I'll think about that tomorrow."

It was Sunday, and at Antoinette Farthingill's brunch Lucy looked into tennis pro Gilbert Traylor's Paul Newman-blue eyes and her knees almost buckled. That face, that physique, those strong yet tender hands as he lifted her tiny hand to his lips and refrained from saying, "As a kid my mother used to punish me by not letting

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me watch your show!" What he said was, "What a grip you've got! You could develop a terrific backhand."

She said, "I'll bet you say that to all the girls."

"No, I don't, Mrs. Fless. You're something special."

"Call me Lucy."

"Lucy."

Antoinette Farthingill, who had made the introduction, smiled and thought, Goodbye, Herbert.

Gilbert Traylor's lovely home in the Hollywood Hills above Sunset Boulevard had, of course, a superb tennis court, and it was there that Lucy began her lessons and her affair with the sexy hunk.

One night in bed, eating a pizza without anchovies, Lucy said, "Do you suppose anyone suspects what we're up to?"

"Does it matter?" asked Gilbert suavely, as though nimbly returning a ball to a superb serve. "Everyone in this town cheats. Do you want to be considered a nonconformist?"

"Oh, Gilbert, I've never loved anyone the way I love you! Where are the black olives?"

He wiped his fingers on the top sheet and said huskily, "I want to run away with you."

"That would take money. I don't have a nickel of my own. Where do you rate in Dun and Bradstreet?"

"Me? Are you nuts? I'm up to my neck in debt. I'm down to one credit card."

Lucy pounded the palm of her left hand with her right fist. "There must be a way to get money! There must be! Take me to you roughly, Gilbert! I think better when I'm manhandled!"

There followed weeks of frustration, wondering how to raise the money to go off together. Lucy skated on thin ice, dodging Herbert's suspicions that she was "seeing someone else."

Then came the fateful morning when Juanita, who a month earlier had surprisingly made her peace with Lucy over lunch at a Taco Bell, telephoned and asked Lucy, "Did you read that awful thing about Ada Warner in the papers this morning?"

Ada Warner had been Lucy's bridge partner the day Antoinette suggested tennis lessons. "No! She's not dead, is she?"

"She's been kidnaped."

"Kidnaped! By whom?"

"If they knew, they'd have rescued her. They're asking a big ransom."

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"How big?"

"Five million big."

"Is that husband of hers that wealthy?"

"Crawling with it."

"Oh, poor Ada! She never thought twice about trumping an ace. Five million dollars. Do you think he'll pay it?"

"Even if he hates her, he has to. Do you think he dare lose face in the community?"

"I hope they don't kill her. She makes wonderful strudel."

"Maybe she'll be one of the lucky ones. How's for some shopping on Rodeo?"

It took Lucy several moments before begging off. Her mind was at work, her brains well oiled and churning, stoked by a scheme she considered not merely brilliant but foolproof.

Later that day when she explained it to Gilbert, he stroked his chin and was briefly lost in thought. Then there was a trace of mischievous smile on his full, lush lips. "Maybe it can work. Maybe."

Two nights later, Herbert came home from his office and demanded of the butler, "Where's my wife?"

"She went out shortly after lunch, sir. She had a telephone call from one of her ladies. I think she went to play cards."

"But she's always home to greet me at this hour," Herbert objected. The phone rang.

The butler picked up the receiver. "I'll see if Mr. Fless is available." He put his hand over the mouthpiece and said to Herbert, "It's for you, sir."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know the person's name, sir, but he said if you want to see Mrs. Fless alive you'd better fork over five million dollars."

Herbert felt faint. He grabbed the phone. "Who is this?" The disguised voice repeated his demands as Juanita came tangoing into the hall.

"Why's Daddy so white?" she asked the butler. The butler told her. Juanita crossed herself and said, *"Madre de Dios."*

Herbert replaced the receiver. "Five million dollars! Nobody's worth five million dollars!"

"Dad! You've *got* to pay it. You can't lose face in the community. That's what it cost Jake Warner to get Ada back."

"But he loves Ada!"

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"Dad, to the press and public you have to profess to love Lucy. You've got to pay the money."

"I'm phoning the police!"

"Go right ahead. You'll still have to cough up."

The next morning, Lucy Crewe was back in the headlines again. Kidnaped! Two TV networks hired writers to concoct a possible new TV series for her. Good old Marvin Kominski phoned Juanita and asked if there was anything he could do to help. Juanita thanked him and told him, "The kidnapers want me to deliver the ransom to them tonight at midnight in a secluded spot near Laguna. And the police mustn't follow me or they'll kill Lucy."

"You? All by yourself? That's dangerous!"

"Don't be silly. I've had dinner with Warren Beatty."

"Rescue her, Juanita. Rescue her for me. She's hot again. A couple of networks want her. She can get fifty thou a pop."

"I'll rescue her, Marvin. I've really come to like Lucy. How I misjudged her."

"You're a good kid, honeybadge."

In the dark of night, a suitcase containing five million dollars on the front seat next to her, Juanita drove at a hundred miles an hour to the location specified by the kidnapers. If the police secretly tailed Juanita, they were out of luck. She knew another way to get to the location other than that specified by the kidnapers.

An hour later, she pulled into a hidden driveway off an infrequently used back road. Ahead of her was a small cottage from which emanated the sound of a Cole Porter tune played by the Mantovani orchestra. She turned off the motor, got out of the car with the suitcase, and crossed to the front door of the cottage. Opening the door quietly, she saw Lucy and Gilbert swaying romantically to the intoxicating music. She lifted the suitcase with an effort and cried triumphantly, "Ta da!"

Lucy cried with delight and ran to Juanita, embracing her with gratitude. Gilbert placed the suitcase on a table, opened it, and almost wept at the sight of five million dollars.

"Oh, Juanita! Juanita! We can't thank you enough! You must have a million for yourself!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Only a million?" Juanita asked. The voice wasn't Juanita's. It was harsh and threatening.

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"Why, Juanita—then have two if one isn't enough. Isn't that all right, Gilbert?"

"Of course it is, darling," said Gilbert as he shot her in the heart.

Lucy looked as startled as the day she found out she was different from boys. She heard Juanita hiss a nasty epithet as she fell backward to the floor.

"Hateful bitch," Juanita snapped as Gilbert crushed her to him and smothered her mouth with his. Gasping, she pulled away and said, "Wait, first what do we do with her body?"

The story is now a legend in Hollywood. Both Lucy Crewe Fless and her stepdaughter, Juanita, had disappeared along with a suitcase containing five million dollars. Their bodies were never found. After a brief period of mourning, Herbert Fless was married a third time—to a screenwriter who was smart enough to get him to write her an agreement to pay her several millions in the event of a divorce.

But even more surprising was the marriage of Antoinette Farthingill to tennis pro Gilbert Traylor, who announced he had come into a sudden inheritance from an old uncle in New Zealand. At lunch at Spego's with an available young starlet, Marvin Kominski said, after relating the story of the two disappearances, "You know, honeybagels, as my mother used to say when she was standing next to an open barrel of schmaltz herrings, 'Something smells around here.' "

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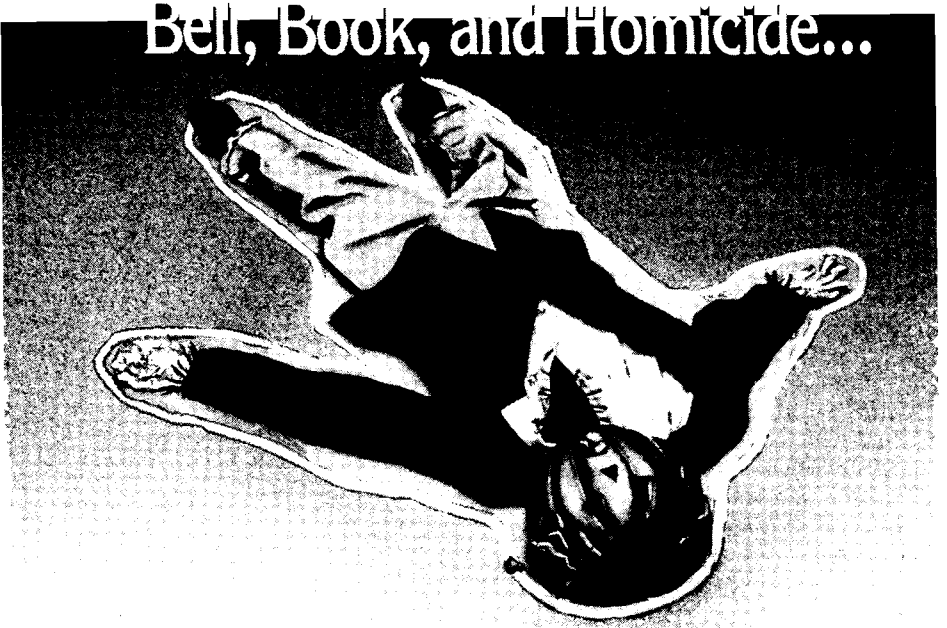

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a *NEW* Polly and Wallis MacDougal story by

JAMES POWELL

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FUNERAL PIE

by JAMES POWELL

"But surely you're mistaken, sir," insisted young Mrs. Bumbleby, giving her head a toss that set her bonnet ribbons aflutter. "The police found the idol's eye in Mr. Achmed Khan's possession. Besides, who but a floating dervish could rob a temple idol protected on all sides by a moat of fire?"

Mr. Loomis Webster smiled his tight-lipped smile and continued to fold and return the pieces of lace scattered about the counter to their proper shelves. He found his associate at her most attractive when her eyes flashed in disputation. "Dear lady," he replied in a voice which ever sounded in need of a good dusting, "as for the so-

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called floating dervishes, we had only Mr. Pandi's word that the man belonged to such a sect. You, whose thoroughness is legendary, were unable to link Mr. Khan to them. As for the idol's eye being in Mr. Khan's possession, did you not also establish that Mr. Pandi recently invested heavily on the Amsterdam exchange?"

"Quite so, sir," admitted Mrs. Bumbleby. "No doubt he became familiar with Dutch stocks during his long residence in that country before arriving in our midst."

Mr. Webster raised a long, wise finger. "Then I submit that Mr. Pandi saw an opportunity to swindle a vocal enemy of his religion. He stole the idol's eye and used it as security to obtain a loan from Mr. Khan. Then he made sure the police knew where the eye could be found."

Mrs. Bumbleby had been weighing his words. Now she added to them. "Of course," she said in a voice of discovery. "And Mr. Pandi would contradict Mr. Khan's story of how the stolen eye came into his hands. The police would then charge Mr. Khan with the theft."

"Precisely," said Mr. Webster. "And afterwards they would return the idol's eye to the temple."

"But however did Mr. Pandi steal it, sir?" asked the lady, taking up her reticule in preparation for the omnibus trip home to her Bumbleby brood.

"Throughout this entire matter, there was only one thing I asked you to find that you could not," said Mr. Webster.

Mrs. Bumbleby's eyes flashed anew. "I assure you that nowhere in the temple is there a long pole with a hook on one end such as are used to open and close high windows."

"And yet the temple had high windows, did it not? And Mr. Pandi spent years in Holland, did he not? No doubt he was quite expert in the Dutch practice of jumping their dikes and ditches by means of long poles."

Mr. Webster came from behind the counter and walked his associate to the door. "Yes," he added, "that is how Mr. Pandi stole the idol's eye. He took a running start, plunged one end of the pole in the heart of the flames, and, holding tight to the other, he vaulted over to the idol, plucked out the eye, and vaulted back again. Then he left the pole to burn in the flames lest the charred end give him away."

They paused in the doorway of the shop. The newspapers were reporting how Greenacre, the famous murderer, carrying the severed head of his victim wrapped in a handkerchief on his knee in

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an omnibus, had almost fainted with fright when the conductor told him the fare was "six pence a head." As a result Mr. Webster felt obliged to ask if he could accompany his associate on her ride home.

Mrs. Bumbleby knew why he made the offer. She also knew that the world beyond the walls of his shop held as many terrors and mysteries for Mr. Webster as the human heart itself. With a grateful little curtsy, she assured him she would be quite safe, adding, "Surely with all the stories abroad, sir, the omnibus is no longer a murderer's favorite means of going about his business." With these smiling words, she stepped out onto Creep Street and hurried on her way.

Wallis MacDougal set the manuscript down on the barroom table. He took a sip of beer before he turned to his wife and said, "This new character, this Bumbleby woman, isn't she a shade pushy? I mean, Webster's the one with all the brains."

Polly eyed her husband suspiciously. Had he just made a veiled description of their marriage? Before she could reply, Hogus Zercher returned with beer in a plastic pitcher, the second he'd cajoled out of Wallis in half an hour. ("It's more economical by the pitcher," boomed the old man, his hoarse growl like thunder aged in whiskey.) Polly could tell her husband, who was in one of his penny-pinching moods, wasn't sure about the saving considering the way Hogus topped off his friends' glasses at every table along his route back from the bar.

Hogus was a tall, burly seventy-year-old with large soiled features, big ears, nose, jaw, and hands. He smelled of many things. But right now it was mostly beer and wood smoke, for he and his friends spent their days—and their nights, too, when the weather was fair—camped out across the railroad tracks along the river shore in a collection of tents and lean-tos and whatever scavenged furniture they could manhandle down there. When things turned cold, as they had just started to, Hogus slept in his car—"The Mercury Hotel" he called it—until his old bones couldn't take it any more. Then he'd move in with his daughter and son-in-law, something he didn't like to do, he said, "because they try to clean up my act."

Hogus had starred on White Swan's high-school football team when Polly was starting grade one. Later she remembered him as a sportily dressed young man with a loud laugh, the kind who liked to shout his hellos and insults to friends on the other side of the

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street. Later still, when Polly worked on her college oral-history projects, he'd given her a lot of stories about his father, a dealer in river coal dredged up from the sizable accumulation on the river bottom near the town, a by-product of the final washing process from the coal mines upstream.

During Prohibition, Hogus's father also bootlegged, hiding the bottles in his coal deliveries. "Back then, everybody had his own little still working somewhere," Hogus once told her, "just enough to squeeze out maybe two fingers a day in a tumbler. 'Prune whiskey,' they called it, because that's what they mostly used. It'd physic the hell out of you." Wallis had laughed when she repeated that story.

Generous to a fault, it hadn't taken Hogus long to go through what his father left him. The last piece of property, his parents' house, he gave to his daughter when she got married. That was when he took to the river shore. Polly hadn't seen much of him since then.

But earlier that afternoon, Polly, who wrote for children's mystery magazines under the pen name Constanzia Delmar, had just brought her latest effort out front to the shop for Wallis's judgment and found her husband muttering over the bills and the checkbook when Hogus burst into the antique shop, looking a bit worse off for beer, and roared, "You're the one I'm after, Polly girl, you and your mystery stories!"

Polly waited.

"I say my two best friends didn't die by what-do-you-call-it," Hogus explained.

"By misadventure," said Polly. Old Tommy MacFarlan and Ferd Bowers had died in separate accidents within six months of each other the year before, Tommy when a flap from the tent where he was sleeping blew into the fire, Ferd in a hit-and-run as he staggered along the road at night on his way to visit his mother's grave, as he often did when in his cups.

"I'll point the murderer out to you," promised Hogus. "He'll be at Elvin's soon if he isn't already. Then we'll figure out a way to pin it on him."

It was a raw, wet afternoon. Polly didn't hold out much hope for Hogus's foul-play idea. Besides, Elvin's Cafe, a kind of sordid Camelot with neon for torchlight and beer trays instead of knightly shields decorating the walls, was not her favorite place. She glanced

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over at the story in her husband's hand. "There's something I'd like to get in the mail today," she said.

Acknowledging Wallis's existence for the first time, Hogus shouted, "Prof, you got something to read, bring it along! You and a dumb stiff like me don't have much to talk about, right?"

So they had closed the shop and walked through the weather the few short blocks to Elvin's. While Hogus went to the bar to put in their order, the MacDougals sat down at a corner table. Looking around, Wallis said, "This place makes me homesick for Toronto. It's almost as depressing as the beverage rooms of my ill-spent youth." Then he had started in on her story.

They had almost finished the second pitcher of beer when Henry Bender came into the bar wearing a dark topcoat and fedora. His shoes were shined, his cheeks pink and prosperous. Bender, Hogus's contemporary, was the town mortician, although he'd more or less turned the business over to his son, Hen Junior, after a heart attack three years before. Hogus tapped Polly's arm with the back of his hand. "Watch this," he said grimly.

The new arrival went up to the bar. "I'll have my usual," he told Elvin, "and give everybody what they want." This remark was met with loud groans from the patrons. Few looked up from their cards.

"Not no, but *hell* no!" called one.

"Not if it was the last drink on earth," added somebody else.

"He comes in like this every month just before the social-security checks get here and everybody's running on low, and he tries to buy the bar," said Hogus. Then he boomed, "Drumming up a little trade, are you, Henry?"

Henry Bender turned around slowly and looked in Hogus's direction, his face impassive. But when he saw the MacDougals he gave them a smile, picked up his drink, and headed toward their table.

"Christ," muttered Hogus.

"Didn't see you folks when I came in," said Henry, addressing the MacDougals and sitting down next to Polly. He nodded at Hogus—"Hogus" —then leaned past Polly and said, "Wallis, I've decided to sell my Muffin."

"Muffin values are getting a bit out of my price range, Henry," said Wallis. He made a smile. But Polly knew Wallis was cursing to himself. Early in his teaching career at Simon Cameron University, he'd decided to write a definite biography of a local poet, painter, and turn-of-the-century real-estate developer named Floyd

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Muffin. But after ten years of collecting Muffin first-editions, diaries, letters, and oil paintings, he finally admitted to himself that the man was an all-round third-rater. Wallis would never complete the Muffin biography. But he could not make a public declaration of his change of heart about the man until he'd found a way to unload all the Muffin material he'd invested so much money in. Until then, he was obliged to show interest in any Muffins that came along.

" 'The Susquehanna at Chickies Rock by Moonlight' is the best thing the man's done," said Henry. "I'd rather sell to you. It belongs around here, not in Japan. Come by sometime and we'll talk turkey." He finished his drink and started to get up. Then he remembered something and said, "I hope Hogus hasn't been telling you a certain wild story he's been spreading around."

"And what if I was?" said Hogus.

"Oh, you can bellow and roar all you want with your river buddies, Hogus," said Henry. "But it's another thing to trot your lies across the tracks and repeat them to people like my friends the MacDougals here."

"It's a free country," insisted Hogus.

The two men glowered at each other until Henry said, "You and I go back a long way, Hogus. But keep it up with stories I killed Tommy and Ferd and I'll have the law on you." He rose and buttoned his topcoat. "Sorry you had to sit through this," he told the MacDougals. Then he turned and left the bar.

Hogus mouthed curses at his back until he was gone, then he stared down at his shoes.

"But why would Henry want to kill them?" insisted Polly. "You were all such good friends once. You even played football together."

"Made it to the district finals," remembered Hogus. "Served in the same unit during the war."

"I never knew why you broke up," said Polly. "Was it over Mary Elizabeth?"

"Naw," said Hogus. "She was right, marrying Henry. She liked everything too neat and tidy for me." He thought for a moment. "Why did we all break up with Henry?" he asked himself. "Hell, I guess the day finally comes when you've eaten enough funeral pie you realize you're not going to live forever."

Polly saw her husband nod. She had explained to him that locally "funeral pie" meant raisin, the traditional dessert at the get-togethers after the cemetery. Fresh fruit had its season. Death and raisins did not.

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Hogus continued. "It got so, every time Henry gave you a thoughtful look you figured he was measuring you up for your coffin. Hell, right in the middle of happy hour, he'd smile at you across the table like he was thinking, Yes, that's it, that big sloppy grin of his—that's how I'll make him look when I lay him out. Something like that can really put a damper on letting the good times roll. So Tommy and Ferd and I sort of dropped Henry."

"But isn't that ancient history?" asked Wallis.

"In a small town that's the only history there is," said Hogus. "Anyway, he never dropped us. I wish the hell he had. He made me nervous. Every time you turned around in town or on the path down along the river, there Henry was, with a smile like a jackass and a tip of the hat. I'm not joking. Hell, two or three times I woke up at night sleeping in my car and there he was, smiling in at me through the window. Tommy said my trouble was he'd stolen Mary Elizabeth from me and I was afraid he'd come to bring her back."

Hogus laughed thoughtfully. "Good old Tommy. I used to lie like hell, but I could never get ahead of him. Did you know his old man was a famous poacher, Polly? And Tommy had his recipe for swan's-neck soup. We were going to put together a batch if we ever came by the makings, but Tommy took the recipe to his grave." Hogus reflected on the loss for a bit. Then he said, "But let's keep our minds on business. We've got to make Henry pay for his crime."

Polly glanced at her husband, who shook his head but indicated he'd go along with whatever she wanted to do. Polly turned to the old man and said, "Hogus, nothing you've told us proves Henry Bender killed anybody."

"The driver of the fire truck says they passed somebody in a coat and hat heading away from the fire the night Tommy died," insisted Hogus.

"Somebody in a coat and hat just isn't good enough," said Polly.

A week later they found Hogus Zercher dead in the front seat of his car, his Mercury Hotel, parked down near the boat landing. A pint bottle with a heel of whiskey in it lay on the dashboard. The autopsy said death by carbon-monoxide poisoning. It looked like he'd been sitting there with the motor running and the heater on to warm up the car so he could get to sleep and he dozed off. The car had a defective exhaust pipe.

Two nights later, the MacDougals returned from Hogus's viewing at the Bender Funeral Home to find a portly young man with large

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eyeglasses, a brown-wool jacket, and a brown-knit hat waiting for them outside the door to the shop. The only child of elderly parents, Leonard Hooper had inherited just enough money to allow him to turn a hobby into a life's work, devoting himself entirely to the study of owls. When he wasn't gluing newspaper clippings on owls into scrapbooks or scouring second-hand book lists for additions to his own library, he was clanking around in the dark along the river shore, harassing the owl population with his arsenal of telescopes, binoculars, listening devices, and tape recorders. Stuffed great horned owls still redolent of traces of some fifty-year-old skunk dinner tenanted his house. Owl bookends, owl lamp bases, and a pot-bellied stove painted to resemble an owl furnished it.

"I brought something to swap you for that glass bell with the three saw-whet owls," said Leonard as Wallis unlocked the door and let Polly and the visitor precede him into the shop. For the last few years, the young man had been trading off his mother's copper-luster collection for any owl-related item that took his fancy.

But before they got down to business, Leonard and the MacDougals discussed Hogus's death. Leonard said there was talk among Hogus's river-shore buddies that he'd been murdered like old Tommy and Ferd. "Hey, the whole bunch of them sure didn't do any scientific studies any good, keeping the owls stirred up the way they did," he observed, adding with the quick paranoia of the monomaniac, "but I wouldn't have killed any of them for that. Or the other guy—the one I saw down there the night Hogus died."

Wallis sat up in his chair. "Who was that, Leonard?"

"Who?" said Leonard, looking pleased with himself.

"Who," ordered Wallis flatly, his tone indicating that he wasn't going to play any of the young man's silly owl games.

Duly chastened, Leonard told them he'd been up in a blind with his camera, across from a silver maple where he suspected an owl was roosting. He saw headlights swing through the trees as Hogus's car came over the tracks and parked under some trees near the shore. Then he'd turned his attention back to business. About ten minutes later, out of the corner of his eye he saw something move. Swinging his binoculars around, he saw Henry Bender walking away from Hogus's car.

The cemetery where Hogus Zercher was buried lay on a slope above the town. Below it lay the spires and rooftops, the ochre of the trees along the shore, the dull steel of the water, and beyond

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that the grey river hills. The wind had been cold all morning. Both Polly and her husband now believed that Henry had come upon Hogus asleep in his car, started the engine, and left him to die. The problem was proving it.

Wallis seemed preoccupied throughout the graveside ceremony. Once Polly heard him make a noise of discovery under his breath, but when she looked he was frowning at something miles away. Or was he thinking about the bills and the checkbook again?

Afterwards Hogus's daughter invited everyone back to her place. Wallis asked Polly to make their excuses, saying, "Swan's-neck soup, prune whiskey, and funeral pie is about as far from Toronto as a man can get. Let's pay Henry Bender a visit instead."

"About what?" asked Polly.

"When in doubt, try a touch of the bluff," he said.

"And just what's this bluff we're talking about?" asked Polly, her voice growing icier by the word, for she suspected she wasn't going to find out until Henry Bender did.

Wallis looked wise. "In due course, my love," he said. "I'm afraid people can read you like a book. What you don't know can't hurt us."

As they headed back to the car, Polly decided she would have her revenge by writing her next story about a character from Constanzia Delmar's stable who never failed to make her husband uneasy. She might even call the story "Bug's Last Case" and bring the insufferable little insect's career to an end by having someone step on him. The story would begin:

"Doctor Frogmore's Traveling Menagerie Show was a down-at-the-heels affair, from the faded plumes on the work-horse team to the wagon's greening gilt and the tinhorn bleat of the trumpet which announced its arrival in the town square. In fact, the entire operation looked badly in need of a good dose of Dr. Frogmore's Melancholy Waters, that amazing tonic whose distribution was the true purpose for the caravan's visit. The first act on the program was Billy the Kid, a yodeling goat in a ten-gallon hat which it ate as an encore. Next came the artistic seal, who wore a beret and made up in conceit and self-applause what it lacked in talent. Indeed the poor creature couldn't draw flies on a hot day.

"But the star of the show was that educated insect, that wise pest and renowned know-it-all, Humbert Bug, B.A., whom Dr. Frogmore displayed in a woven cricket cage, promising the learned creature would reply to all their questions and solve their every problem,

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writing out his answers with a dip pen and tobacco juice.

"But today's questions were few and uninteresting. The small crowd dispersed quickly, those who actually purchased bottles of the melancholy waters gloomily shaking their heads at their own foolishness. Poor Dr. Frogmore, that benefactor of mankind, having failed even to make the price of Billy's ten-gallon hat, had just begun the task of packing up and moving on when a large, intelligent-looking woman who had watched the show from the edge of the crowd stepped forward and spoke his name. She had a plain but pleasant face of the sort that inspires a feeling of well being in those who see it.

" 'A certain party here in town,' she told him, 'has killed two friends of my youth and may have marked me for extinction as well. To prove my case against him, I would like to hire your Mr. Humbert Bug.'

"As she spoke, she picked up the cage and peered inside. Mr. Bug, long-limbed and green, was stretched across a divan wearing a brocaded smoking jacket with the mouthpiece of a hook in one hand and a French novel in the other. She gave the cage a playful if somewhat violent shake to interrupt the cozy scene before continuing—"

The Benders lived on the second and third floors of a large rambling Victorian house of eccentric design and unexpected windows built by Henry's grandfather back in the days when coffins were only a small sideline to a prosperous furniture business. The funeral parlor occupied the first floor and the basement. Young Hen Junior came to the door still wearing his cemetery clothes. He tried to put the MacDougals off with the story that his father was feeling under the weather, but Henry called down from the top of the stairs to invite them up.

They found him waiting for them with a drink in his hand. He didn't sound like it was his first. "Come about my Muffin?" he asked. When Wallis said they hadn't, Henry cocked an eyebrow. Then he ushered them back to his apartment, which was in the new wing over the limousine garage. "The Susquehanna at Chickies Rock by Moonlight" occupied the place of honor on the living-room wall. Polly gave it a quick glance, recognizing the tree in the foreground as one that popped up in several of the artist's works. So had the effect of the moonlight on the water.

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Henry offered them seats and nodded at the whiskey bottle on the coffee table. "I was giving old Hogus a sendoff," he said. "What'll you have?" He grew cautious when they both declined a drink. "All right," he said, sitting down in an easy chair, "so this isn't a social visit. What's going on?"

"We're on our way to see Officer Darnley with some information about Hogus's murder," lied Wallis. "We thought maybe you'd like to come along."

Bender looked glum. "Now just why would I want to do that?" he asked.

Wallis said, "Your big mistake was fingerprints."

Bender gave him a long, sad-eyed stare. Then he smiled and shook his head firmly.

Polly kept her eyes on her husband's face. But there was more to his bluff than that. "Oh, not the ones on the door handles," he continued. "By the time they got Hogus's body out of the car, there wouldn't have been much left of those. But I saw the towtruck bringing the car over the tracks the next morning. You should have come back and turned the motor off, Henry. If it hadn't run until the tank was empty, they wouldn't have had to tow it. And it wouldn't be sitting on the back lot at the gas station right now with your fingerprints on the key in the ignition."

No one spoke for a moment. Then Bender said, "Oh, hey, did I miss my cue? Was I supposed to say something like, 'But there weren't any fingerprints. I wore gloves'?"

Polly saw her husband shift in his chair uncomfortably as if things weren't quite going his way. "Someone saw you at Hogus's car the night he died," said Wallis lamely.

Henry shrugged. "I won't deny it. Hell, I was there. But I didn't kill him." He freshened his drink and shook his head. "My fingerprints aren't on the key. I wish the hell they were." He paused to let that sink in. Then he said, "So why shouldn't I go down to Elvin's every now and then and buy a round of drinks? I went to school with most of that crowd. Hogus said I was drumming up business. Hell, an undertaker can't win. People said the same thing when I bought the new baptismal font for the church on the bypass."

Henry gave a bitter laugh and added, "Sure, Hogus, old Tommy, and Ferd and I had been good buddies. But I sure wasn't going to make a career out of fishing and sitting in campfire smoke. I had my family and the business to worry about. So I didn't really take it that hard when they started giving me the cold shoulder." He

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looked down into his glass. "You know, I had a birthday last month and Young Hen got me a tie. Said he'd picked it out himself. And I couldn't help thinking that he'd chosen something to go well with my best suit, the one I'm going to be laid out in." He laughed again. "I guess I'm starting to know how I made them feel.

"Anyway, in the last few years I got a kick out of being their guardian angel. And it didn't hurt any that I was getting under Hogus's skin. So I kept an eye on them. And there was a lot to watch out for. Old age and alcohol don't mix with much, not campfires or night traffic or car heaters. Once I saved old Tommy's life when he fell asleep in an old overstuffed chair he'd dragged too far into the campfire smoke to keep off the mosquitoes.

"Another time I came by and there all three of them were, drunk as lords and ready to fire up the cookstove to fry themselves a midnight snack. 'Hold it,' I said. 'That's the gas can you've got there, not the kerosene.' 'Amscray, Henry,' Hogus told me. But he knew I had him."

Henry took a drink and said, "Poor old Tommy, I was heading his way the night he died and saw the flames through the trees. I got there too late. And I told Ferd, I said, 'For Godsake, you're too old to be playing in traffic. You get this urge to visit your mother's grave, be it day or night, I'm your boy. I'll drive you up. Let it be our little secret if that's the way you want it.' And sometimes he did."

Polly knew her husband had thrown in the towel when he said, "I'll take that drink now." Henry rose and turned and smiled at Polly. When she nodded, he went into his tiny kitchen for glasses and ice. "And do you really think that was the only time Hogus ever fell asleep in his car with the motor running?" he asked over his shoulder. "Hell, twice in the last four or five years I found him asleep myself and turned off the motor, cranked down a window, and went on my way. But this last time I was tired, and when I looked in the window it seemed to me that Hogus looked tired, too. Maybe he was already dead. But no maybes about it, I should have done something, not just walked on by. I guess I wanted to get things over with. You saw the deceased in his coffin. That was my work. I think I did right by him. Just like my son will do it right by me."

For the rest of the day, the black mood Wallis MacDougal carried back with him from Henry Bender's deepened. After dinner, he fell silent and sat brooding in his easy chair, staring at the spot on the

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ceiling shaped like the Isle of Man. Polly waited, expecting that sooner or later he would utter some observation on the human condition touching on the case at hand. But Wallis didn't say anything until they were in bed and the light was out.

"Polly," he asked, "how about this year we make a real effort to cut back on the heat? You know, wear sweaters, longjohns, maybe live in one or two rooms and—"

"Good night, Wallis," she told him.

She lay there with her arms crossed, scowling up into the darkness. After a few minutes the scowl turned into a smile. Why not? she thought. It'd be perfect for *Godfather Goose Magazine*'s Christmas issue. All she'd have to do was scatter a lot of snow around, put runners on Dr. Frogmore's wagon, dress everybody up in woolen scarves and red noses, and give the seal a toque instead of a beret. And she'd make Humbert Bug, B.A., the king of the skinflints, with a quill pen behind his ear and a thick ledger under his arm, and freeze the pinchpenny sourpuss's tail off in a cage so cold and drafty the candle flame would turn to ice on the wick. And whenever there was a lull in the action, Billy the Kid would stick his head in the door and yodel, "God bless us every one."

Not a bad idea. Not bad at all. Pleased with what might be her next story, Polly relaxed and felt sleep rise up to pull her under.

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a classic reprint by

JACK RITCHIE

The following story is an excellent example of how the author could masterfully pack a short tale with enough twists and turns to accommodate a full-length novel, and yet make it look as easy as slipping on a banana peel . . .

THE DEVERAUX MONSTER

by JACK RITCHIE

"Have *you* ever seen the monster?" my fiancée, Diana Munson, asked.

"No," I said. But I had. A number of times. I smiled. "However, everyone seems to agree that the Deveraux monster rather resembles the Abominable Snowman, but with a coloring more suitable to a temperate climate. Dark brown or black, I believe."

"I wouldn't take this at all lightly, Gerald," Diana said. "After all, my father *did* see your family beast last night."

"Actually it was dusk," Colonel Munson said. "I'd just completed a stroll and was about to turn into the gate when I looked back. The fog was about, nevertheless I clearly saw the creature at a distance of approximately sixty feet. It glared at me and I immediately rushed toward the house for my shotgun."

Freddie Hawkins summoned the energy to look attentive. "You took a shot at it?"

Colonel Munson flushed. "No. I slipped and fell. Knocked myself unconscious." He glared at us. "I did not faint. I definitely did not faint."

"Of course not, sir," I said.

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Colonel Munson, recently retired, and his daughter Diana came to our district some eight months ago and purchased a house at the edge of the village.

Fresh from Sandhurst and bursting for a good show, he joined his regiment on November 12, 1918, and that initiated a remarkably consistent career. In the Second World War he sat in England during Monty's North African campaign. When he finally wrangled a transfer to that continent, he arrived three days after Rommel's command disintegrated. He fretted under the African sun during the invasion of Europe and when at last he breathlessly reached France, the fighting had moved to Belgium. He still fumed at a training depot near Cannes when our forces joined the Russians in Germany. In the 1950s he set foot in Korea just as the cease-fire was announced and during the Suez incident he was firmly stationed at Gibraltar. It is rumored that his last regiment's junior officers—in secret assembly—formally nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Freddie sighed. "All I have at my place is a ghostly cavalier who scoots about shouting for his sword and cursing Cromwell. Rather common, don't you think? Haven't seen him myself yet, but I'm still hoping."

Diana frowned in thought. "Who else, besides Father, has seen the Deveraux monster recently?"

"Norm Wakins did a few nights ago," Freddie said.

I smiled. "Ah."

Freddie nodded. "I know. Norm hasn't gone to bed sober since he discovered alcohol. However, he has always managed to walk home under his own power. As a matter of fact on Friday evening he was quite capable of running. Norm left the village at his usual time—when his favorite pub closed—and his journey was routine until just north of the Worly Cairn when 'something made me look up.' And there he saw it—crouching and glaring down at him from one of those huge boulders strewn about. His description of the animal is a bit vague—he did not linger in the area long—but from what I was able to piece together, it was somewhat apelike, with dangling arms, a hideous face, and glowing yellow eyes. He claims that it was fanged and that it howled as it pursued him to his very cottage door."

"I shall have to carry a revolver loaded with silver bullets," I murmured.

"Only effective against werewolves." Freddie stretched lazily. "During the last ninety years the monster has been seen dozens of times."

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Diana turned to me. "Gerald, just how did your family *acquire* this monster?"

"There are dark rumors. But I assure you, there is *no* Deveraux monster."

Freddie scratched an ear. "Gerald's grandfather had a brother. Leslie. Well, Leslie was always a bit wild and just before he disappeared—"

"He went to India," I said. "And eventually died there."

"—just before he *disappeared,* Leslie seemed to grow a bit *hairy.*"

I remembered a few paragraphs of the letter my grandfather had left to his son—a letter which had been passed on to me by my father.

I first became aware of what was happening when I accidentally came across Leslie at the Red Boar. It is not my usual pub—when I do go to pubs—but I was in the vicinity after seeing my tailor and thirsty for a pint.

When I entered, I recognized my brother's back at the bar. I also noticed that the other patrons seemed to shy away from him and that the barmaid, in fact, appeared rather pale.

When Leslie turned at my approach, I stopped in shock. His eyebrows had grown thick and shaggy, his hairline was almost down to his eyes, and his complexion had turned a dark brown. He leered when he saw me, revealing stained yellow teeth.

I had seen him less than two hours before, but now I scarcely knew him!

"According to legend," Freddie continued, "Gerald's great-uncle never did go to Africa, or India, or some beastly place like that. His brother was finally forced to keep him confined. In the east room on the third floor, wasn't it, Gerald?"

"Someplace about the house," I said. "Though if you have a monster, I should think that a more logical place to keep him might be in one of the cellars."

"Too damp," Freddie said. "And you must remember that your grandfather was rather fond of his brother—monster or not."

Diana's eyes widened. "You don't mean that—?"

"Oh, yes," Freddie said. "Leslie is supposed to have turned into the Deveraux monster."

"How ghastly," Diana said dutifully. "But *why?*"

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Freddie shrugged. "Heredity, possibly. The monster eventually escaped. Bit through his chains, I believe. The Deverauxs always had good teeth." He looked at me. "Either that or he was let out periodically for a constitutional?"

"My grandfather would never release a monster," I said firmly. "Matter of honor."

Freddie calculated. "If this monster is human, I mean solidly animal, then it would be about ninety years old—considering Leslie's age at the time of his metamorphosis. Rather decrepit by now, I should think. Did you happen to notice its condition, Colonel?"

Colonel Munson glowered at the floor. "Seemed spry enough to me."

"I know that people have *seen* the monster," Diana said. "But is it dangerous?"

Freddie smiled faintly. "Eighty-five years ago a Sam Garvis was found dead on the moors. He was frightfully mangled."

"Packs of wild dogs roamed this area in those days," I said. "Garvis was unfortunate enough to meet one of them."

"Possible. But fifteen years later your grandfather was found dead at the base of a cliff."

"He fell," I said. "Broke his neck."

"Probably he fell because he was being pursued by the monster," Freddie said. "It had been seen just before he died. And then there was your father. Died of fright practically at his front door."

"I did not *faint*," Colonel Munson muttered.

"Father did not die of fright," I said. "Weak heart plus too much exercise." I glanced at my watch and rose. "I'll have to be running along, Diana."

Freddie got up too. "Mother's expecting me. Besides, Gerald needs an escort across the moors. Someone fearless."

The colonel saw us to the door. He was a short, broad-shouldered man with a military mustache in grey prime. "I'm going to hunt the beast."

"Best of luck," I said.

"I'll need it," he said morosely. "Hunted tigers in Malaya, leopard in Kenya, grizzly in Canada. Never got a blasted one."

Freddie and I said our goodbyes, adjusted our collars against the late afternoon's chilly mist, and began walking.

"I rather envy you," Freddie said.

"I'm perfectly willing to give you the monster."

"I mean Diana."

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"Quite different."

Freddie brooded. "Of course I can't court her now. You do have some kind of a definite arrangement, don't you?"

"We're getting married in June."

He sighed. "My only hope is that the monster might slaughter you before then."

"No assists, please."

"Wouldn't think of it. After all, we've known each other since time began, so to speak. Served in the same regiment. I saved your life."

"Barely."

"I'm fumble-fingers with bandages and the like. Besides, I couldn't remember where the pressure points were supposed to be."

We walked silently for a while and then he said, "You don't really believe there is a monster, do you?"

"Of course not."

We parted at the branch in the path and I went on toward Stonecroft.

I made my way among the lichen-covered boulders and paused for a moment at the remains of the huts. They were low roofless circles of stones now, but once they had been the dwellings of a forgotten, unwritten race. Perhaps they were men erect, but I have always had a feeling that they might have been shaggy and that they crawled and scuttled by preference.

I wondered again what had happened to them. Were they all really dead and dust or did their blood linger in our veins?

The moor wind died and I glanced up at a faint rustle. A dark figure moved slowly toward me in the swirling wisps of fog.

When it was within twenty feet of me, I recognized Verdie Tibbs.

Verdie is simple. Actually quite simple and he likes to roam the moors.

I thought he seemed a little disappointed when he saw me, but he smiled as I said, "Hello, Verdie."

"I thought it was my friend," Verdie said.

"Your friend?"

Verdie frowned. "But he always runs away."

"Who does?"

Verdie smiled again. "He has fur."

"Who has fur?"

"My friend. But he always runs away." Verdie shook his head and wandered back into the dusk.

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I reached Stonecroft ten minutes later. No one seems to know just how old my home is. It had begun existence as a modest stone building in a distant time, but generations of Deverauxs had added to it—the last substantial addition being in 1720. My contribution has been the installation of plumbing, electricity, and the telephone. At the present time I occupy only the central portion of the three-story structure and very little of that.

When I reached the studded front door, I heard the great key in the lock and the bolt being drawn. The massive door opened.

"Well, Jarman," I said. "Taken to locking the doors?"

He smiled faintly. "It's my wife who insists, sir. She feels that it would be wiser at the present time."

"I've never heard that the monster enters buildings."

"There's always a first time, sir."

Jarman, his wife, and their twenty-year-old son Albert are my only servants at present. I could perhaps do without Albert, but it is family history that the Deverauxs and the Jarmans stepped over the threshold of Stonecroft at approximately the same moment. Turning out a Jarman would be equivalent to removing one of the cornerstones or snatching away the foundation of Stonecroft.

At late breakfast the next morning, I noticed that Jarman seemed worried and preoccupied. When he brought the coffee, I said, "Is there something troubling you, Jarman?"

He nodded. "It's Albert, sir. Yesterday evening he went to the village. He wasn't back by ten-thirty, but my wife and I thought nothing of it and retired. This morning we found that he hadn't slept in his bed."

"Probably spent the night with one of his friends."

"Yes, sir. But he should at least have phoned."

Freddie Hawkins wandered in from the garden and took a seat at the table. "Thought I'd drop over and see if you're tired." He helped himself to bacon. "Sleep well last night?"

"Like a top."

"No sleepwalking?"

"Never in my life."

"You look a bit hairy, Gerald."

"I need a haircut and I haven't shaved yet. Bachelor's privilege."

"Do you mind if I examine the bottoms of your shoes?"

"Too personal. Besides, if I roamed the moors last night as the monster, I wouldn't have worn shoes."

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"There is the possibility that you are a monster only from the ankles up, Gerald." He took some scrambled eggs. "I suppose you'll be dropping in at the Munsons?"

"Of course."

"Mind if I toddle along?"

"You're frightfully infatuated, aren't you?"

"Fatally. We male Hawkinses are invariably lanky, tired, and muddleheaded, but we are always attracted to the brisk practical woman. The moment I saw Diana and learned that she had once taken a course in accounting, I experienced an immense electrical reaction. You couldn't step out of the picture, could you, Gerald? For an old comrade-in-arms?"

"Not the thing to do."

"Of course," he said glumly. "Not gentlemanly. It's the woman's prerogative to break up things like this." He seemed to have something else on his mind and after a while he spoke again. "Gerald, last night Diana saw the monster."

I frowned. "How do *you* know?"

"She phoned my mother," Freddie said. "They get along rather well." He put down his coffee cup. "Just after she retired, Diana thought she heard a noise outside. She went to the window and there in the moonlit garden she saw the monster. By the time she roused the colonel and he found his shotgun, the creature had scampered away."

I lit a cigar and took several thoughtful puffs.

Freddie watched me. "I don't know what to make of it either."

After I shaved we walked to the Munson house.

Diana met us at the door. "Gerald, I'd like to talk to you alone for a few moments, please."

Freddie waved a languid goodbye. "I'll go on to the village. The Red Boar, if anyone needs me desperately."

When we were alone, Diana turned to me. "Really, Gerald, I cannot accept a monster."

"But Freddie is really very—"

"I mean the Deverax monster."

"Diana, if the animal exists, I believe that it is actually benign."

"Benign, my foot! That thing is dangerous."

"Even if it is, Diana, it seems that only the male Deverauxs have anything to fear."

"Gerald, I am looking at this from the practical point of view. I simply cannot have you murdered after our marriage, especially if

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we have children. Do you realize that the death duties these days would force me to sell Stonecroft? I might even have to go to London to find some employment. And I do not believe in working mothers."

"But, Diana—"

"I'm sorry, Gerald, but I've been thinking this whole thing over. Especially since last night. I'm afraid I'll have to call off our engagement."

"Diana," I said—and winced. "Is there . . . is there someone else?"

She thought for a moment. "I'll be frank with you, Gerald. I've been examining Freddie. He does seem to need management. I've met his mother and we seem to have a lot in common."

"Freddie has his ghost too," I pointed out. "That cavalier who runs about looking for his horse."

"His sword. But he is entirely harmless. He's tramped about the grounds since 1643 and has never yet harmed anyone."

"Suppose he finds his sword?"

"We will cross that bridge when we come to it."

I went to the window. "That cursed monster."

"It's your own fault," Diana said. "You Deverauxs should have watched your genetics and things like that."

I left her for the village and stopped at the Red Boar. Freddie was rather pale. "I just heard," he said. "Jarman's son, Albert, was found dead on the moor a half an hour ago. Head bashed in. Quite a messy business."

"Good Lord! Who did it?"

"No one knows yet, Gerald. But I'm afraid that people are talking about the Deverauxs monster." He smiled faintly. "Gerald, I'm afraid that I've given you a rather hard time about that. I just want to say that I really believe that you only need a haircut and that's all."

I returned immediately to Stonecroft, but the Jarmans had evidently gone on to the village.

I went upstairs to the east room and unlocked the chest. I removed the envelope and re-read my grandfather's letter.

I believe the expression on my face gave Leslie considerable pleasure. I pulled myself together and was about to ask for some explanation, but Leslie took my arm and led me outside. "Later," he said.

We mounted our horses and rode out of the village. After half a mile, Leslie pulled up and dismounted. He removed his hat and then I watched a transformation. He pulled at his forehead and the coarse

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hair forming his low hairline came away in his fingers. His bushy eyebrows disappeared in the same manner. "And, my dear brother," he said, "my complexion can be washed away and a good tooth-brushing will remove the stain from my teeth."

"Leslie," I demanded sternly. "What is the meaning of this?"

He grinned. "I'm creating a monster. The Deveraux monster."

He put his hand on my shoulder. "Bradley, we Deverauxs have been here since the dawn of history. We were here before the Norman invasion. Deveraux is not French, it is simply a corruption of some prehistoric grunts applied to one of our ancestors. And yet, Bradley, do you realize that we are not haunted *by anything or anyone?"*

He waved an arm at the horizon. "The Hawkins family has its blasted cavalier. The Trentons have their weeping maid waiting for Johnny to come home from the fair, or some such thing. And even the Burleys, nouveau riche, *have their bally butler drifting through the house looking for the fish forks. But what do we have? I'll tell you.* Nothing."

"But, Leslie," I said. "These are authentic *apparitions."*

"Authentic, my Aunt Marcy! They were all invented *by someone with imagination to add to the midnight charm of the homeplace. People are not really repelled by ghosts. They* want *them. And so when they do not tell outright lies about seeing them, they eventually* convince *themselves that they have.*

"Bradley," Leslie continued. "I am creating *a Deveraux monster. And what better way than this? The villagers actually* see *me gradually turning into an apelike creature. And in a week or so, I, the human Leslie Deveraux, will disappear."*

I blinked. "Disappear?"

"Bradley, I'm the younger son. I cannot possibly remain at Stonecroft the rest of my life waiting for your demise. You seem remarkably healthy. I suppose I could poison you, but I'm really fond of you. Therefore the only course left is for me to go abroad to seek fame, fortune, and all that rot. But before I go—as a parting present, so to speak—I am leaving you the Deveraux monster. I will be seen wandering the moors—in full costume—and pursuing a passerby here and there. I have had a complete suit constructed, Bradley. It is locked in a chest in the east room and I will don it for my midnight forays."

I immediately and vigorously launched into argument condemning his scheme as absolutely ridiculous and insane, and, at the time, I thought that I succeeded in convincing him to give up the entire thing.

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But I should have known Leslie and that half-smile when he finally nodded in agreement.

He wandered the moors in his Deveraux monster suit the next week—though I did not learn about it until later. It seems that people were reluctant to bring the creature's existence to my attention, since there was a general feeling that Leslie was undergoing a transformation.

And then Leslie disappeared.

It was not until a year later that Leslie wrote me from India, but in the meantime I had no answer to those of our friends who cautiously inquired about his disappearance. In a fit of pique one day, I declared that actually I kept Leslie chained in the east room. It was an unfortunate remark and my words were eagerly taken at face value by a number of people who should have known better.

I might have exposed the Deveraux myth when Leslie's letter finally came, if, in the meantime, this district had not enacted the mantrap laws.

I have never scattered mantraps about my grounds. I feel that their jaws are quite capable of severing a poacher's leg. But I have nourished the impression *in the countryside and at the village that I was quite liberal in strewing them about my property. That was quite sufficient to keep most of the poachers off my land.*

But then, as I mentioned, the mantraps were outlawed, and if I have a reputation for anything, it is obeying the law and the poachers know that. They immediately descended upon me with their snares and traps, causing untold depredations to the American quail and partridge I had introduced on the moor.

I tried everything to stop them, of course. I appealed to the authorities, I hired a gamekeeper, and I even personally threatened to thrash any poacher I apprehended on my property.

But nothing availed.

It was in a moment of total desperation that a wild idea descended upon me. I gathered up the house keys and went up to the east room. I opened the chest Leslie had left behind and the Deveraux monster costume was inside.

It fit me perfectly.

I believe I have never since enjoyed myself as much as I did in the next few weeks. At night I would don the costume and wander about. I tell you, my son, it was with the most delicious pleasure that I pursued—with blood-chilling howls—the elder Garvis to the very door of his cottage.

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The elder Garvis did not poach again—to my knowledge—but it is unfortunate that his experience, or his relation of that experience, did not make an impression upon his son. He persisted in poaching and eventually toppled off a cliff and broke his neck.

It is widely believed that his demise occurred while the monster pursued him. That is not true. I never met Sam, Jr., on the moors. But I have done nothing to discourage the legend. As a matter of fact, the monster has been "seen" a number of times when I did not leave the house.

And so, my son, when I depart, I leave you the Deveraux monster. Perhaps you too will find some use for him.

Your loving father,
Bradley Deveraux

My own father had added a note:

Gerald, it is remarkable how persistent the Garvis family is. Each Garvis, apparently, must learn about the monster from first-hand experience before he refrains from poaching.

I pulled the costume from the chest and slipped into it. At the mirror I gazed at the monster once again.

Yes, he was indeed frightening, and the good colonel had fainted.

Norm Wakins had seen the Deveraux monster, and simple Verdie Tibbs, and Diana.

But Albert Jarman? No.

After I let Diana catch a glimpse of me, I had returned directly home. I had met no one on the way and I had gone directly to bed. And slept soundly. Except for the dream.

I removed the head of my costume and stared at my reflection. Did I need a shave again?

At dusk I saw the Jarmans returning to Stonecroft and let them in the front door.

Mrs. Jarman was a spare woman with dark eyes and she stared at me as though she was thinking something she didn't want to believe.

"Mrs. Jarman," I said. "I'd like to extend my most sincere—"

She walked by me and disappeared into the back hall.

Jarman frowned. "Mrs. Jarman is very upset, sir. We all are."

"Of course."

Jarman was about to pass me, but I stopped him. "Jarman, do the authorities have any idea who might have killed your son?"

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"No, sir."

"Is there any . . . any talk?"

"Yes, sir," Jarman said. "There is talk about the Deveraux monster." He sighed. "Excuse me, sir. I should go to my wife."

Before turning in for the night, I opened the bedroom windows for air. The rolling hills of the moor were bright with the moon and in the distance a dog howled. I felt the drift of the cool wind.

A movement in the shadows below caught my eye. I watched the spot until I made out a crouching figure. It moved again and stepped into the light.

It was Verdie Tibbs. He glanced back at the house for a moment and then disappeared into the darkness.

That night I dreamed again. I dreamed that I left the house and roamed across the moors until I found the circle of stones. I remained there waiting. For anyone.

Albert Jarman's funeral took place on Thursday and I, of course, attended. It was a dark day and at the graveside the mist turned to light rain. Most of the countryside seemed to be in attendance and I was conscious that a great many of the eyes found me with a covert glance.

Freddie Hawkins came to Stonecroft the next morning while Jarman and I were going over the household accounts.

He sat down. "Frank Garvis was found dead in his garden this morning. Strangled. He had several tufts of hair or fur clutched in his fingers. Definitely not human, according to the inspector."

Jarman looked up, but said nothing.

I rubbed my neck. "Freddie, just what do *you* make of all this?"

"I don't know. Perhaps some ape has escaped from a circus or something of the sort?"

"The papers would have carried a notice."

He shrugged. "Could there actually *be* a Deveraux monster?" He looked at Jarman. "What do you think?"

"I have no opinion, sir."

Freddie grinned. "Perhaps Gerald rises in the middle of the night, gripped by some mysterious force, and goes loping about the moors searching for a victim." He shook his head. "But I guess that's out too. I hardly think that he would grow fur just for the occasion. Or does he slip into a monkey suit of some kind?"

Freddie looked at me for a few moments and then changed the subject. "My mother told me about your break with Diana. Dreadful sorry, Gerald."

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"I think she rather fancies you," I said.

He flushed. "Really?"

"No doubt. She's impressed by your intelligence and drive."

He smiled. "No need to get nasty."

After he left, I went upstairs to the east room and unlocked the chest. I pulled out the Deveraux monster. Tufts of hair had been torn from both of the arms.

That evening I was in my study with a half-empty bottle of whiskey when Jarman entered.

"Will that be all for today, sir?" he asked.

"Yes."

He glanced at the bottle and then turned to go.

"Jarman."

"Yes, sir."

"How is Mrs. Jarman?"

"She is . . . adjusting, sir."

I wanted to pour another glass, but not while Jarman was watching. "Do the authorities still have no suspects for your son's murder?"

"No, sir. No suspects."

"Do *you* have any . . . ideas?"

His eyes flickered. "No, sir."

I decided to pour the glass. "Does your *wife* have any ideas? Does she think that the Deveraux—?" I found myself unable to go on.

I drank the whiskey and my next words came suddenly and were undoubtedly inspired by the drink. "Jarman, I want you to lock me in my bedroom tonight."

"Sir?"

"Lock me in my bedroom," I snapped.

He studied me and there was worry in his eyes.

I took a deep breath and came to a decision. "Jarman, follow me. I have something to show you."

I led him to the east room, unlocked the chest, and put the envelope in his hands. "Read this."

I waited impatiently until he finished and looked up.

"You see," I said. "There is *no* actual Deveraux monster."

"No, sir."

"Jarman, I wouldn't tell you what I am now going to if it weren't for the present circumstances. I must have your word of honor that

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you will not repeat my words to a soul. To no one at all, do you understand?"

"You have my word, sir."

I paced the room. "First of all, you know that the poachers have been plaguing us again?"

He nodded.

"Well, Jarman, I have been wearing the Deveraux monster. I am the one responsible for chasing Norm Wakins to his door. I am the one who met poor simple Verdie. Accidentally, I assure you. He is not a poacher. He actually tried to make friends with me and I was forced to flee." I stopped pacing. "My only intention was to frighten away poachers."

Jarman smiled faintly. "Is Colonel Munson a poacher?"

I felt myself flushing. "That was a spur of the moment thing. A lark."

He raised an eyebrow ever so slightly. "A lark, sir?"

I decided that I might as well be embarrassingly candid. "Jarman, you are aware that the colonel and Diana Munson came here about eight months ago? And that within two months I found myself engaged?"

"Yes, sir. Rather sudden."

I agreed and cleared my throat. "I was committed and I am a gentleman. A man of my word, but still . . . "

The corners of Jarman's mouth turned slightly. "You found yourself not quite as happy as you thought you should be?"

I flushed again. "I happened to see Colonel Munson while I was in the monster suit and suddenly it occurred to me that if the colonel, and perhaps Diana herself, should see the monster, they might not be so eager for me to . . . " I wished that I were downstairs with the bottle.

"I understand, sir," Jarman said. "And I am sure that Miss Munson will be quite satisfied with Mr. Hawkins."

"Jarman," I said. "I have frightened a number of people, but I have injured no one. I am . . . positive . . . that I did not kill your son." I stared down at the Deveraux monster in the chest and at the bare spots on the arms.

Jarman's voice was quiet. "Do you still want to be locked up for the night, sir?"

There was silence in the room and when I looked up, I saw that he was watching me.

Finally Jarman said, "I *know* you didn't kill Albert."

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"You *know?*"

"Yes, sir. Two nights ago Verdie Tibbs came to the back door and spoke to me. He saw Albert killed. He saw the murder from a distance, too far away to give aid to Albert—and the crime was over in an instant."

Jarman looked tired. "Albert was returning from the village and apparently he came across a set of poacher's snares or nets. According to Verdie, Albert was bending over them and he seemed to be tearing them apart, when suddenly someone leaped behind him and struck him with a rock."

"Who was it?" I demanded.

Jarman closed his eyes for a moment. "Frank Garvis, sir."

"But why didn't Verdie go to the authorities?"

"Verdie was afraid, sir. He's heard talk that he might be sent to an institution and he wants nothing to do with any public officials. But even if he had gone to the authorities, what good would that have done, sir? It would have been the word of simple Verdie against that of Frank Garvis."

"But then *who* killed Garvis last night?" I looked down at the chest again and wondered if I had only been dreaming when—

"Sir," Jarman said quietly. "The Jarmans and the Deverauxs have been together ever since the beginning. There are no secrets a Deveraux can keep from a Jarman—not for long." He smiled faintly. "My grandfather also left a letter to his son, and, in turn, to me."

He took a key out of his vest pocket. "This unlocks the chest too, sir, and the Deveraux monster fits me as it did my grandfather and my father whenever they wished to wear it."

Jarman sighed. "I would have preferred to remain silent on the whole matter and let it pass. But I could see that you were beginning to fear that you were responsible and so I had to speak. Now that you know, I will put my affairs in order and then go to the police with a full confession."

"What have you told your wife?"

"Nothing but that Garvis killed Albert. I did not want her to think what the villagers are thinking."

I rubbed my neck. "Jarman, I fail to see that any good can come of your going to the police."

"Sir?"

"The Deveraux monster murdered Garvis," I said. "I think that it is much, much better if we leave it that way."

After a while, Jarman spoke faintly. "Thank you, sir."

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I pulled the Deveraux monster out of the chest. "However, I believe that we should destroy this, don't you, Jarman? After all, someone might manage to compare it with the tufts of hair Garvis had in his fingers."

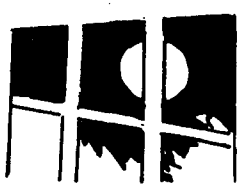
Jarman put the monster over his arm. "Yes, sir. I'll burn it." At the door he looked back. "Is the Deveraux monster dead, sir?"

A sudden gust of moor wind whispered around the shutters.

"Yes," I said. "The Deveraux monster is dead."

When he was gone, I happened to glance at the mirror.

Strange. I rather needed a shave again.



DETECTIVERSE

MYSTERY BUFF

by CINDY RILEY

I've ruled out lover, butler, friend
Since every clue's revealed—
And now I fight the urge to cheat
By peeking at the end.

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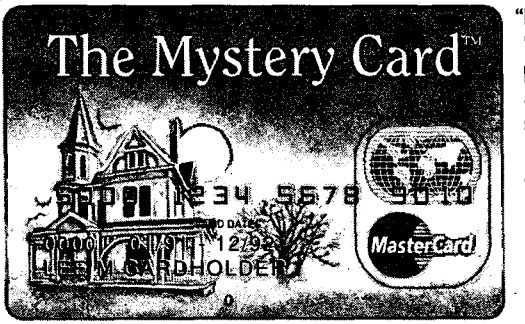

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PREVIOUS EMPLOYER (if with present employer less than one year) | WORK PHONE ( ) - | YEARS THERE

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a *NEW* short story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

She rummaged in her bag and brought out an enlarged snapshot. It showed a smiling male corpse, lying on an oriental rug. It wore a tuxedo. The dead right hand held a note. Penciled handwriting said, "Farewell my love," signed by a red print of lips. A female foot in a red high-heeled shoe rested on the corpse's chest. A long leg. The hem of a red skirt.

"Ah," the commissaris said, "Paul? After the heart attack? He looks pleasant enough to me."

In writing the following story, the author took his inspiration from the cover-photograph scenario devised by our art director, Terri Czeczko, when Mr. van de Wetering was in the city for our 50th Anniversary party. However, what has grown from this acorn is tall, strong van de Wetering oak . . .

THE QUEEN'S ANGEL

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

She walked over to the gentleman sitting on a weathered bench on Prince Island, an ancient suburb on the south side of the river—part of the city of Amsterdam, Holland's capital. The lady in red sat down next to the little old gentleman.

She said, "You're a nice man, sir."

"I am?" Amsterdam's Chief of Detectives asked.

A cold finger touched his hand. "Yes."

He had been watching a pair of mallard ducks courting on the waterway ahead. They'd been circling each other, the female in charge and bobbing about; now they were nodding and bowing. He wondered whether he was expected to nod and bow, too.

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He thought she was attractive: long-legged, firm-bodied, the red dress demurely expensive. The face might be operated on and she might be in her forties. Her scanty makeup was effective, outlining large, alluring, gleaming eyes, full moist lips, high cheekbones. She had elf's ears, small and pointed, set off against short black hair. She was slim.

"You're neat," she said.

He was. His shantung-cotton suit, somewhat worn, was tailored to fit a slight body elegantly. The new straw hat shaded intelligent pale-blue eyes. He had a straight nose under large gold-framed glasses. His narrow hands rested on the gold knob of a thin bamboo cane.

"Make your point, dear," the Chief of Detectives said firmly.

"You think I'm a whore?" the lady asked.

"Are you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "You think I'm panhandling? For drug money maybe?"

He checked her pupils. "I don't think so, dear."

"Am I bothering you?" the lady in red asked. "I can go away."

An overcultured voice, the Chief of Detectives thought. A university accent? Her manner reminded him of female relatives who had studied at the exclusive University of Leyden. And she seemed self-assured. A successful professional? A lawyer? No, he dealt with lawyers all the time. Lady lawyers are sharp-snooted. She seemed quiet and introverted in spite of her momentarily forward manner.

"M.D.?" he asked.

She laughed. "Correct."

He noticed a diamond ring, a gold watch, the smartly cut red dress again—matching shoes, scarf, pocketbook. The getup seemed suggestive of professionally beautiful models as shown in the magazines his wife kept scattered on coffee tables. "You practice medicine?" he asked.

"Not for some years now," the lady said.

He noted the consistently coldly defensive voice contrasting with her direct pushy manner. His manner of observation was the police manner, of course—always focused on contradictions. The punk in the Rolls Royce, the quietly well dressed gent staggering about drunk in the worst alley in town, the shy pushy lady. The punk stole the car. The gent is about to shoot a male prostitute for blackmail. What did the shy, pushy lady do?

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He got up, lifted his hat, said his name, that he was pleased to meet her, put out his hand.

"Marion," she said, shaking his hand.

He sat next to her again. "Marion who?"

"Can I be a little anonymous for now?" Marion asked. "Would you mind, commissaris? Until I know you a little better?"

She would have seen his face in the papers, he thought. He'd been in the news again: a tricky case, he hadn't even solved it. Sergeant de Gier did the work but the journalists liked to have the commissaris' picture in the paper—the wise old man, as the morning paper had it.

"What can I do for you, Dr. Marion?" he heard himself say kindly. Does a wise old man allow his meditations on the weathered bench on Prince Island to be disturbed? He liked to come here to ruminate on the relativity of things. Stare at the rippling river. "Reflections on the sea of illusion." He had read that somewhere.

It was true—the older he got, the less things seemed real.

"I need to ask you something," the lady said.

The guru syndrome, the commissaris thought. The lady wanted free information from above. Why come to me? he thought. What did she think he knew? He was just another ignoramus, bumping about on the miracle, manipulating the riddles, but tell that to the morning paper. Wise old man.

"I live with death," Marion said.

We all do, the commissaris thought, but he didn't say that.

"Everything I live with dies," Marion was saying.

He noticed her voice was hoarsely dead itself, as if a dry wind blew through a delicate mask—her face. The fingers that touched his wrist were cold. Her smile was cold.

He shivered. She withdrew her hand: "Low body temperature, commissaris, it's been with me ever since. I'm used to it now."

He saw that her tight skin wasn't due to a face lift. Marion's face was a live skull. The eyes seemed no longer mysteriously attractive but hollow, quite empty.

"I'm sorry," she said when he shivered again.

"What died?" he asked. "What did you live with that died?"

The process started slowly, she explained. First her house plants started dying. She always liked growing greenery. She cultivated mini palms and large ferns in a solarium on the back porch. Prize geraniums in the windows. Then all the plants died on her.

"Disease?" the commissaris asked.

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Yes, Marion explained, but plant disease can be treated. She washed the palms, dusted the ferns, cut the geraniums down. They withered anyway.

Peabody died, too. Peabody was the dog, a cute little mutt. He got a cancer.

"Was he old?"

"Only five."

Albertine, the Siamese cat, was next.

Marion got a puppy and a kitten from the pound—an undefined virus interfered, they never grew up. She took up horseriding in Amsterdam Forest. Any horse she rode sickened. The stable canceled her membership card. She bought her own horse. Kaiser died, too.

"Of what?"

"Of a shot in the head. His leg was broken."

The commissaris sat quietly.

"Bad luck?" Marion asked.

He told her that that interpretation was her own. He told her about his wife's uncle and the bombing of Rotterdam during World War II. German three-engined Juncker airplanes bombed the open city when it refused to surrender to SS commandos smuggled in on river barges. When Dutch marines pushed the enemy back, the Junckers set the city on fire.

Uncle drove to town to try to save expensive merchandise in his store. The warehouse burned. While Uncle watched his uninsured fortune blaze, fleeing folks stole his car. Uncle walked home, and found it flattened—no wife left, no kids. Uncle had always been irritated by breaking shoelaces. At that moment, one broke. Uncle laughed, laughed, laughed.

"The broken shoelace was good luck?" Marion asked.

The commissaris couldn't define the event, but Uncle, having nothing more to lose, became a much decorated freedom fighter. He married again, started a business again, never cared much again.

"Free forever?" Marion asked.

The commissaris pursed thin lips. "Mustn't exaggerate, my dear."

"My story is different, perhaps." Icy lips touched the commissaris' cheek, and he was alone again, watching ducks.

"This isn't over yet," his wife said when he told her that evening, feeling guilty a bit while touching feet under the eiderdown—an intimacy he enjoyed.

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"You want to see the lady in red again?" his wife asked.

"Not really, Katrien."

"Then stay away from Prince Island."

The commissaris did that, to please Katrien. He didn't think that at age sixty-four, crippled on bad days by a rheumatic hip condition, plastic-toothed, coughing painfully at times—he no longer smoked but carbonized lung tissue takes a while to grow back—he presented much of a challenge.

He still wanted, on days off, to reflect on the sea of illusion, so he rented a dory on the Amstel River.

Marion showed up on the dock.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Be my guest."

She had elegant legs. The short red skirt wasn't designed for boating.

"You should play a guitar," Marion said.

"I could sing."

The commissaris sang "My Funny Valentine."

"The Chet Baker version," Marion said. "I used to have the record, but it got scratched at parties." She caressed his knee. "You're very courageous, aren't you? I thought that long note had to break until you folded it round." She smiled. "Just barely, but that's all it needs."

"Miles Davis sometimes plays like that," he said.

She smiled. "You must really know jazz."

"Two of my associates play the genre. Adjutant Grijpstra on drums and Sergeant de Gier on flute. They encourage me to join them." He looked at wavelets, set up by a fresh breeze.

"You've been singing long?"

"I sang as a boy," the commissaris said. "Then, for a hundred years, I was too shy. I'm glad my associates got me into it again." He was rowing with long strokes, feeling vigorous for a change. "Jazz singing can reach far."

"How far?"

"All the way?" he asked.

She laughed.

He rowed the dory into a cove. The sun was still warm. Pink-striped carps did their ritual mating dance between waving cattails. A marsh heron, its squat brown-and-yellow body hidden perfectly in shadows of waving reed rushes, startled them by bursting out in booming warning calls like sudden drumbeats.

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"Grijpstra sometimes explodes like that," the commissaris said, "and then he's back on the edge of his snaredrum, doing dry ticking: the crackle of understatement that drives the listener wild." He grinned. "It's the understatement that makes jazz truthful."

He had brought a thermos filled with strong coffee and a bag of ginger cookies. She shared his silver mug.

He began to feel cold and blamed his old bones.

"Dear old bones." Marion smiled. "Maybe we shouldn't be meeting like this. Next time we'll have lunch." She told him about a divorced father she hardly knew but ran into in Paris. He had asked her to lunch and they ate fried sole in a little restaurant with a view of the Seine. "The only time we were close."

"I'm a father figure to you?"

"What else?" She laughed her chilly laugh again. "But you're not my father."

"I'd like fatherly advice," Marion said when the dory entered the rental marina.

"All an old man is good for," the commissaris joked.

She didn't pick that up. He noticed again that her mask didn't move. "Even the weeds in my garden are dying," she said. "Do you think it's something I did?"

"What did you do?" the commissaris asked.

She waited until the dory was tied to the dock and he helped her out. "You know I'm a doctor," Marion said, hand on his shoulder, stepping up on the dock. "Doctors heal. But I killed my husband."

The breeze blew his boater into the Amstel. By the time he retrieved the hat, Marion's car drove off.

"A wrong diagnosis, perhaps," the commissaris told his wife. "Doctors can't help making tragic mistakes sometimes. Remember Cousin Jasper?"

"Jasper," Katrien said, "was an apprentice, and the professor in charge was unwell when they brought in the little girl."

"The little girl died," the commissaris said, "because of Jasper's tragic mistake."

"Jasper lives in the country now," Katrien said, "growing tomatoes as a hobby. He also keeps healthy goats. You stay away from that killing woman."

"But, Katrien . . ."

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The commissaris and Marion ate fried sole in a restaurant next to the Concertgebouw, at his invitation by phone. "How did you locate me?" Marion asked.

He didn't tell her, but it was simple enough. Sergeant de Gier found her. The leads were few but clear: a forty-plus lady called Marion with a Leyden medical degree driving a red Ferrari.

"How did you find me renting the dory?" the commissaris asked.

Chance. She happened to see him there. The meeting at Prince Island was chance, too. She knew what he looked like from published photographs and approached him by instinct.

"Would you have contacted me again?" he asked.

She said yes, even the huge tree in front of her house had died. "Am I killing the city?"

The sole *a la meuniere,* served whole, larger than the large silver dish it came on, was just excellent, crisp on the bone, tender inside. The little potatoes were good and crumbly. The Belgian endive salad was fresh and chewy. Marion wore a red dress again, not the same as the second time, not the same as the first time. She looked very good in red.

"So you killed your husband?" he asked conversationally. "How did you do that?"

"I aggravated a psychosomatic condition," Marion said. "Paul thought his heart was bad. His worrying brought on palpitations. I prescribed drugs that made the palpitations kill him."

"Why did you want him dead?"

"I wanted his money," she said, "and I wanted his brilliant friend, Bad Bart."

"Define 'bad,' " the commissaris said.

"Do you," Marion asked, "believe that nothing matters?"

"Did Bart?"

"Do *you?*" she asked coldly.

"I believe the experiment of creation is unplanned," the commissaris said, "but I find random evolution fascinating, anyway, perhaps because of its chaotic essence."

She sighed. "Bart talked like that. He found everything senselessly fascinating, including me. I thought I agreed. I wanted to prove my insight, to astonish him. We were reading Sartre then. Bart told me we were free."

"You *are* free," the commissaris said.

"I wish I wasn't," Marion said.

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"And nothing matters," the commissaris said. "But maybe there's more to that." He poked about in his sole. "Was it Bart's idea that you would kill your rich husband?"

"No," she said. "He said he couldn't, because of some conditioned hangup, sleep with a friend's wife, so I removed his friend." She massaged her tight cheeks. "Doesn't that sound stupid now?"

"This is like the meeting with your father in Paris?" the commissaris asked.

"No." She put down her fork. "I didn't want anything from him then. We just happened to meet and then we had that nice lunch."

"What do you want from me?" the commissaris asked.

"I want things to stop dying around me." Her voice had become brittle.

"When did this murder happen?"

"It *happened,*" she said, "that's my point. Everything happens. We happen. Nothing is planned. Life happened to start up four billion years ago and eventually we happened along with it, and I happened to kill Paul. That's what I thought then—I don't know what I think now."

He had wanted to order the peche melba or a chocolate mousse perhaps, delicacies that replaced nicotine—this was the day he could grant himself a dessert. She wanted only coffee. He sipped his own, watching her smoke.

"You smoke a lot?"

"Rarely." She laughed. "I don't have bad habits. I just killed my husband." She rummaged in her bag and brought out an enlarged snapshot. It showed a smiling male corpse, lying on an oriental rug. It wore a tuxedo. The dead right hand held a note. Penciled handwriting said, "Farewell my love," signed by a red print of lips. A female foot in a red high-heeled shoe rested on the corpse's chest. A long leg. The hem of a red skirt.

"Ah," the commissaris said. "Paul? After the heart attack? He looks pleasant enough to me."

"Boring," she said. "Repetitive. Paul drank a lot."

"*Your* leg?"

"Yes," she said.

"Your note, your handwriting, lipstick imprint of your mouth?"

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently. "Yes!"

"Who took the photograph?"

"I had my camera set up for delay," she said, "with the button on automatic."

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"I'm a policeman," the commissaris said. "You sought me out twice. Deliberately. You made an effort. You've managed to make me curious. I may be after you now. You know what you're doing?"

"You think I'm giving myself up? The photograph is proof."

"When did this happen?" the commissaris asked.

She smiled sadly. "Fifteen years ago. Deadline for arrest is after sixteen years. You can still arrest me. I took that photograph to impress bad Bart. It aggravates my crime. Isn't this a good case?"

He played with his napkin. "You've done some research—but have you considered what you're presenting here? A weird confession hardly supported by circumstantial evidence. There was no autopsy?"

She shook her head. "I called in a colleague. She diagnosed heart trouble. A natural death."

"Any witnesses?" the commissaris asked, holding up the snapshot. "Bad Bart saw this happen?"

"No."

"You and Paul were going out?" the commissaris asked.

"To a concert."

The commissaris looked thoughtful. "Oh, dear."

"The evidence might be good," she said. "My handwriting, my leg—"

"No," the commissaris said. "I wouldn't handle the case." He gave her the photo. "The prosecutor wouldn't, either. Neither would a judge. That photo might be a joke, made long before your husband's death, as your lawyer would point out. Your confession could be hysterical." He waved his napkin. "This country's roots are Calvinistic, we're all obsessed with guilt."

"I am now," she said. "I was then. Bart wasn't even bad."

"What happened to the man?"

"Weak Bart didn't like everything dying around me, either, and then he died, too, due to a heroin addiction. He fell off a streetcar."

"You didn't arrange that?"

"No." The cold smile was back. "I was paying for treatment. He slipped out of the clinic."

The commissaris helped Marion into her coat.

"I know what I'm doing," she said while he walked her to the Ferrari. "You're a top-ranking policeman, serving both the citizens and the Queen. The Queen is the crown. The crown is the magic intermediary through which citizens reach divinity. The symbolism is clear. If I apply for grace, I have to see the Queen's angel . . ."

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On Sunday morning, the commissaris walked to Marion's house. His hips were hurting again, he couldn't sleep. It was five A.M. The birds were singing, the summer sun filtered pale-orange light through narrow streets. Marion Janssen, M.D., lived, Sergeant de Gier reported, in a silver-grey slender-gable house at Gentlemen's Canal—a most superior address in the old city's very core. She was a widow. Paul Janssen was heir to a brand of good cookies. His death made her rich. And crazed, perhaps, the commissaris thought.

The commissaris was sorry now that something like this had happened to him again. He should have refused. Why would he accept a crazed citizen's bother?

Was he like the German university professor who striptease artist Marlene Dietrich made a despicable fool of in the movie *Blue Angel* that he owned on video—a self-destructive drama he watched sometimes, sipping hot cocoa, when Katrien was out?

Had he wished for a witch?

Was he caught up in some nonsense again?

Then, on the empty quay, in the thin early-summer-Sunday-morning's glow, as the only citizen about in a still-dehumanized city, he saw the dead tree.

There were lots of trees on the Gentlemen's Canal, spaced evenly—majestic elms branching out widely, each loaded with a million leaves—but only Marion's tree was dead. Its imposing skeleton gestured bleakly in front of an ailing house. The commissaris checked cracked basement windowsills and doors, painted recently, the paint already flaking off. The massive brass doorknob was dull. The granite steps were cracked. The house, seven stories high, seemed to be leaning far forward. He painfully climbed the steps to the front door, leaning on his cane, peering into the first-story windows.

No plants anywhere. No dog yapping. No slinky cat movements. No twittering sparrows, not even a crow in the dead tree, no pigeons fluttering around tiles or gutters. But this is Amsterdam, the commissaris thought, bird city. He did see waterfowl farther up and down the canal. On the water nearby there was only a duck, upside down.

The door opened. Marion, in a red kimono, attempted a smile of welcome. "See the dead duck? You think I shot it because I felt you were coming?"

So he believed her now.

"Explain it to me," Marion said, serving instant coffee.

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He shrugged.

She pointed at his chest. "No, you're a chief of detectives, you hold a law degree. The papers say you're a genius. You're a public servant. Am I not the public?"

She slid out of her chair, knelt on the bare floor, touched his foot. "I know I'm doing this to myself. I'm sorry I killed Paul. There is no end to this misery. Please save me."

He just sat there, drinking the instant coffee that he didn't like. A neat little old gentleman who couldn't sleep and went for a walk and landed up in a demon's lair, a dying house in the midst of Old Amsterdam's splendor of graceful Golden Age architecture and ever-alive waterways. He saw the dead duck outside, orange webbed feet upward, mini-sails that caught the wind. He grimaced. The coffee was awful. Why didn't she serve filtered Sumatra, store-roasted at one of the city's deli-outlets? She drove a Ferrari.

"How's the Ferrari, Marion?"

"Carburetor trouble," she said, still kneeling. "The fuel injection gets clogged, too. They keep fixing it wrong. I'm walking everywhere now." She tugged the seam of his crisply ironed trouser leg. "My machines sicken, too."

He almost smiled. The coffee was bad, but having this exotic creature humiliating herself was pleasurable in a way. He sighed. One demon creates another?

"Please," Marion said.

"I'll see what my wife says," he said. "Let me go now and I'll ask her."

"So simple," Katrien said. "Look, I don't like your new woman, but surely she has suffered enough. Just do as I said."

"But Katrien—"

"Just do it."

So the black Cadillac, the Mayor's car—but the Mayor was a friend—drove up, escorted by two white BMW twin-cylinder motorcycles, ridden by extra-tall extra-wide Military Police sergeants—the MP colonel was another friend. The Mayor's driver wore his lackey uniform, with a triangle papier-maché hat. The sergeants rode in bearskins, white-leather crossbelts and pistol holders, black-baize uniforms, silver buttons, white braid. The commissaris wore a similar tunic and tight pants, but his buttons and braid were gold. His hat was flat, with more braid on the visor. Crowns shone on his shoulders. His boots were spit-polish. He wore his short sword.

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("Oh, dear—" Katrien had laughed when she dressed him "—oh, dear.")

Marion opened the door. The commissaris, flanked by the sergeants, limped up the stone steps. The sergeants stopped at attention, the commissaris limped on.

Her large sitting room contained nothing but two straight chairs and a small rug. She sat on one chair, he on the other.

"Marion Janssen," the commissaris said, "you sinned, by your own rules, against another lifeform of your species. Since then you have punished yourself. You cannot undo your crime and neither can the crown, but the crown now forgives you. Kneel down on that rug."

He got up and unsheathed his sword. He touched her shoulder with the shiny steel. He sheathed the weapon, stood up straight, made his voice sing: "Rejoice and do better!"

"Did she feel better?" Katrien asked when she helped him take the stiff uniform off.

"She did," he said.

She yanked his boot. "Did she kiss you passionately afterward?"

"Please, Katrien," he said, rubbing a painful hip. "She cried, she trembled, she was awed. The poor thing wouldn't dare. I was the Queen's angel."

"Sure," Katrien said.

"But I do believe that horseplay you came up with broke the spell. She says she's off to Florida, to work in a clinic that breeds healthy offspring from damaged waterfowl—pelicans mostly, an endangered species."

"Good!" Katrien kissed his bald spot. "Good. I'm glad."

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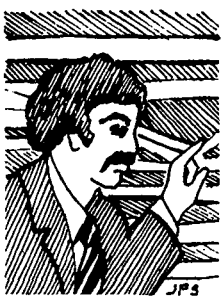
ON OUR COVER

Janwillem van de Wetering was born in Rotterdam on February 12, 1931. The German bombing of Rotterdam and the subsequent five years of military occupation influenced his early thinking. After graduating from business college at age nineteen, he traveled through Africa, South America, Australia, and Japan. He studied philosophy in London and became a disciple of a Zen master in Kyoto. He subsequently wrote two books on Zen, *The Empty Mirror: Experiences in a Japanese Zen Monastery* and *A Glimpse of Nothingness: Experiences in an American Zen Community.* In 1965, he returned to the Netherlands where he managed an Amsterdam textile company and became a member of the Special Constabulary of the Amsterdam Municipal Police, doing street duty in a patrol car and studying police routine and philosophy at officers' classes. His police adventures inspired a series of detective novels featuring Adjutant Henk Grijpstra and Sergeant Rinus DeGier, which include *Outsider in Amsterdam, Death of a Hawker, The Japanese Corpse,* and *The Maine Massacre.* He is also well known to readers of our sister magazine, Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, for his Inspector Saito Masanobu stories set in the holy Japanese city of Kyoto and collected in the volume *Inspector Saito's Small Satori.* Mr. van de Wetering and his wife Juanita make their home in Maine.



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Wickerson frowned. "If you lose, you know, you'll have to pay my *costs as well."*

"I don't expect I'll lose," the old man said.

"Why, of course you'll lose," the young man insisted, although he did not sound convinced. "Dr. Sloan will testify that it was not *'a quick consumption.' He says it was a long-standing case of Negro tuberculosis. And you warranted the man sound."*

"Beats me how them doctors think up long words like that," Bailiss said placidly.

In Ellery Queen's introduction to this story in his anthology The Golden 13, *he praised Mr. Davidson as a born storyteller who "has taken apparently familiar materials, recast them, and achieved both originality and impact. With deceptive simplicity, with perception and artistry, he has struck at the heart of the problem, bringing the whole question of 'the dignity of man' into sharp and revealing focus . . ."*

THE NECESSITY OF HIS CONDITION

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

Sholto Hill was mostly residential property, but it had its commercial district in the shape of Persimmon Street and Rampart Street, the latter named after some long-forgotten barricade stormed and destroyed by Benedict Arnold (wearing a British uniform and eaten with bitterness and perverted pride). Persimmon Street, running up-slope, entered the middle of Rampart at right angles, and went no farther. This section, with its red-brick houses and shops, its warehouses and offices, was called the T, and it

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smelled of tobacco and potatoes and molasses and goober peas and dried fish and beer and cheap cookshop food and (the spit-and-whittle humorists claimed) old man Bailiss's office, where the windows were never opened—never had *been* opened, they said, never were *made* to be opened. Any smell off the street or farms or stables that found its way up to Bailiss's office was imprisoned there for life, they said. Old man Bailiss knew what they said, knew pretty much everything that went on anywhere, but he purely didn't care. He didn't have to, they said.

J. Bailiss, Attorney-at-Law (his worn old sign said), had a large practice and little competition. James Bailiss, Broker (his newer, but by no means new, sign), did an extensive business—again, with little competition. The premises of the latter business were located not in the T, but in a whitewashed stone structure with thick doors and barred windows down in the Bottom—as it was called—near the river, the canal, and the railroad line.

James Bailiss, Broker, was not received socially. Nobody expected that bothered him much. Nothing bothered old man Bailiss much—Bailiss, with his old white hat and his old black coat and his old cowhide shoes that looked old even when they were new—turned old on the shoemaker's last (the spit-and-whittle crowd claimed) directly they heard whose feet they were destined for.

It was about twenty-five years earlier, in 1825, that an advertisement—the first of its kind—appeared in the local newspaper.

"*Take Notice!* James Bailiss, having lately purchased the old arsenal building on Canal Street, will henceforth operate it as a Negro Depot. He will at all times be found ready to purchase all good and likely young Negroes at the Highest Price. He will also attend to Selling Negroes on Commission. Said Broker also gives Notice that those who have Slaves rendered unfit for labor by yaws, scrofula, chronic consumption, rheumatism, & C., may dispose of them to him on reasonable terms."

Editor Winstanley tried to dissuade him, he said later. "Folks," he told him, "won't like this. This has never been said out open before," the editor pointed out. Bailiss smiled. He was already middle-aged, had a shiny red face and long mousy hair. His smile wasn't a very wide one.

"Then I reckon I must be the pioneer," he said. "This isn't a big plantation state, it never will be. I've give the matter right much thought. I reckon it just won't pay for anyone to own more than half a dozen slaves in these parts. But they will multiply, you can't stop

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it. I've seen it in my law work, seen many a planter broke for debts he's gone into to buy field hands—signed notes against his next crop, or maybe even his next three crops. Then maybe the crop is so good that the price of cotton goes way down and he can't meet his notes, so he loses his lands *and* his slaves. If the price of cotton should happen to be high enough for him to pay for the slaves he's bought, then, like a dumned fool"—Bailiss never swore—"why, he signs notes for a few more. Pretty soon things get so bad you can't *give* slaves away round here. So a man has a dozen of them eating their heads off and not even earning grocery bills. No, Mr. Winstanley; slaves must be sold south and southwest, where the new lands are being opened up, where the big plantations are."

Editor Winstanley wagged his head. "I know," he said, "I know. But folks don't like to say things like that out loud. The slave trade is looked down on. You know that. It's a necessary evil, that's how it's regarded, like a—well—" He lowered his voice. "Nothing personal, but—like a sporting house. Nothing personal, now, Mr. Bailiss."

The attorney-broker smiled again. "Slavery has the sanction of the law. It is a necessary part of the domestic economy, just like cotton. Why, suppose I should say, 'I love my cotton, I'll only sell it locally'? People'd think I was just crazy. Slaves have become a surplus product in the Border States and they must be disposed of where they are not produced in numbers sufficient to meet the local needs. You print that advertisement. Folks may not ask me to dinner, but they'll sell to me, see if they won't."

The notice did, as predicted, outrage public opinion. Old Marsta and Old Missis vowed no Negro of *theirs* would ever be sold "down the River." But somehow the broker's "jail"—as it was called—kept pretty full, though its boarders changed. Old man Bailiss had his agents out buying and his agents out selling. Sometimes he acted as agent for firms whose headquarters were in Natchez or New Orleans. He entered into silent partnerships with gentlemen of good family who wanted a quick return on capital, and who got it, but who still, it was needless to say, did not dine with him or take his hand publicly. There was talk, on and off, that the Bar Association was planning action not favorable to Bailiss for things connected with the legal side of his trade. It all came to nought.

"Mr. Bailiss," young Ned Wickerson remarked to him one day in the old man's office, "whoever said that 'a man who defends himself has a fool for a client' never had the pleasure of your acquaintance."

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"Thank you, boy."

"Consequently," the young man continued, "I've advised Sam Worth not to go into court if we can manage to settle out of it."

"First part of your advice is good, but there's nothing to settle."

"There's a matter of $635 to settle, Mr. Bailiss." Wickerson had been practicing for two years, but he still had freckles on his nose. He took a paper out of his wallet and put it in front of them. "There's this to settle."

The old man pushed his glasses down his nose and picked up the paper. He scanned it, lips moving silently. "Why, this is all correct," he said. "Hmm. To be sure. 'Received of Samuel Worth of Worth's Crossing, Lemuel County, the sum of $600 cash in full payment for a Negro named Dominick Swift, commonly called Domino, aged thirty-six years and of bright complexion, which Negro I warrant sound in mind and body and a slave for life and the title I will forever defend. James Bailiss, Rutland, Lemuel County.' Mmm. All correct. And anyway, what do you mean, six hundred and *thirty-five* dollars?"

"Medical and burial expenses. Domino died last week."

"Died, now, did he? Sho. Too bad. Well, all men are mortal."

"I'm afraid my client doesn't take much comfort from your philosophy. Says he didn't get two days' work out of Domino. Says he whipped him, first off, for laziness, but when the doctor—Dr. Sloan, that was—examined him, Doctor said he had a consumption. Died right quickly."

"Negroes *are* liable to quick consumptions. Wish they was a medicine for it. On the other hand, they seldom get malaria or yella fever. Providence."

He cut off a slice of twist, shoved it in his cheek, then offered twist and knife to Wickerson, who shook his head.

"As I say, we'd rather settle out of court. If you'll refund the purchase price we won't press for the other expenses. What do you say?"

Bailiss looked around the dirty, dusty office. There was a case of law books with broken bindings against the north wall. The south wall had a daguerreotype of John C. Calhoun hanging crookedly on it. The single dim window was in the east wall, and the west wall was pierced by a door whose lower panels had been scarred and splintered by two generations of shoes and boots kicking it open. "Why, I say no, o' course."

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Wickerson frowned. "If you lose, you know, you'll have to pay *my* costs as well."

"I don't expect I'll lose," the old man said.

"Why, of course you'll lose," the young man insisted, although he did not sound convinced. "Dr. Sloan will testify that it was *not* 'a quick consumption.' He says it was a long-standing case of Negro tuberculosis. And you warranted the man sound."

"Beats me how them doctors think up long words like that," Bailiss said placidly. "Inter'sting point of law just come up down in N'Orleans, Ned. One of my agents was writing me. Negro brakeman had his legs crushed in a accident, man who rented him to the railroad sued, railroad pleaded 'negligence of his fellow-servant'—in this case, the engineer."

"Seems like an unassailable defense." The younger lawyer was interested despite himself. "What happened?"

"Let's see if I can recollect the court's words." This was mere modesty. Old man Bailiss's memory was famous on all matters concerning the slave codes. "Mmm. Yes. Court said: 'The slave status has removed this man from the normal fellow-servant category. He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of. He cannot with impunity desert his post though danger plainly threatens, nor can he reprove free men for their bad management or neglect of duty, for the necessity of his condition is upon him.' Awarded the owner—Creole man name of Le Tour—awarded him $1,300."

"It seems right, put like that. But now, Dr. Sloan—"

"Now, Neddy. Domino was carefully examined by *my* doctor, old Fred Pierce—"

"Why, Pierce hasn't drawn a sober breath in twenty years! He gets only slaves for his patients."

"Well, I reckon that makes him what they call a specialist, then. No, Ned, don't go to court. You have no case. My jailer will testify, too, that Domino was sound when I sold him. It must of been that whipping sickened him."

Wickerson rose. "Will you make partial restitution, then?" The old man shook his head. His long hair was streaked with grey, but the face under it was still ruddy. "You *know* Domino was sick," Wickerson said. "I've spoken to old Miss Whitford's man, Micah, the blacksmith, who was doing some work in your jail a while back. He told me that he heard Domino coughing, saw him spitting blood, saw you watching him, saw you give him some rum and molasses, heard you say, 'Better not cough till I've sold you, Dom, else I'll have

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to sell you South where they don't coddle Negroes.' This was just before you *did* sell him—to my client."

The old man's eyes narrowed. "I'd say Micah talks overmuch for a black man, even one of old Miss Whitford's—a high and mighty lady that doesn't care to know me on the street. But you forget one mighty important thing, Mr.Wickerson!" His voice rose. He pointed his finger. "It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! Just like my horse is property! And property can't testify! Do you claim to be a lawyer? Don't you know that a slave can't inherit—can't bequeath—can't marry nor give in marriage—can neither sue nor prosecute—and that it's a basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave?"

Wickerson, his lips pressed tightly together, moved to the door, kicked it open, scattering a knot of idlers who stood around listening eagerly, and strode away. The old man brushed through them.

"And you'd better tell Sam Worth not to come bothering me, either!" Bailiss shouted at Wickerson's back. "I know how to take care of trash like him!" He turned furiously to the gaping and grinning loungers.

"Get away from here, you mudsills!" He was almost squeaking in his rage.

"I reckon you don't own the sidewalks," they muttered. "I reckon every white man in this state is as good as any other white man," they said; but they gave way before him. The old man stamped back into his office and slammed the door.

It was Bailiss's custom to have his supper in his own house, a two-story building just past the end of the sidewalk on Rampart Street; but tonight he felt disinclined to return there with no one but rheumaticky old Edie, his housekeeper-cook, for company. He got on his horse and rode down toward the cheerful bustle of the Phoenix Hotel. Just as he was about to go in, Sam Worth came out. Worth was a barrel-shaped man with thick short arms and thick bandy legs. He stood directly in front of Bailiss, breathing whiskey fumes.

"So you won't settle?" he growled. His wife, a stout woman taller than her husband, got down from their wagon and took him by the arm.

"Come away, now, Sam," she urged.

"You'd better step aside," Bailiss said.

"I hear you been making threats against me," Worth said.

"Yes, and I'll carry them out, too, if you bother me!"

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A group quickly gathered, but Mrs. Worth pulled her husband away, pushed him toward the wagon, and Bailiss went inside. The buzz of talk dropped for a moment as he entered, stopped, then resumed in a lower register. He cast around for a familiar face, undecided where to sit, but it seemed to him that all faces were turned away. Finally he recognized the bald head and bent shoulders of Dr. Pierce, who was slumped at a side table by himself, muttering into a glass. Bailiss sat down heavily across from him with a sigh. Dr. Pierce looked up.

"A graduate of the University of Virginia," the doctor said. His eyes were dull.

"At it again?" Bailiss looked around for a waiter. Dr. Pierce finished what was in his glass.

"Says he'll horsewhip you on sight," he muttered.

"Who says?" Bailiss was surprised.

"Major Jack Moran."

Bailiss laughed. The major was a tottery veteran of the War of 1812 who rode stiffly about on an aged white mare. "What for?" he asked.

"Talk is going around you Mentioned A Lady's Name." Pierce beckoned, and at once a waiter, whose eye old man Bailiss had not managed to catch, appeared with a full glass. Bailiss caught his sleeve as the waiter was about to go and ordered his meal. The doctor drank. "Major Jack says impossible to Call You Out—can't appear on Field of Honor with slave trader—so instead will whip you on sight." His voice gurgled in the glass.

Bailiss smiled crookedly. "I reckon I needn't be afraid of him. He's old enough to be my daddy. A lady's name? What lady? Maybe he means a lady who lives in a big old house that's falling apart, an old lady who lives on what her Negro blacksmith makes?"

Dr. Pierce made a noise of assent. He put down his glass. Bailiss looked around the dining room, but as fast as he met anyone's eyes, the eyes glanced away. The doctor cleared his throat.

"Talk is going around you expressed a dislike for said Negro. Talk is that the lady has said she is going to manumit him to make sure you won't buy him if she dies."

Bailiss stared. "Manumit him? She can't do that unless she posts a bond of a thousand dollars to guarantee that he leaves the state within ninety days after being freed. She must know that free Negroes aren't allowed to stay on after manumission. And where would

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she get a thousand dollars? And what would she live on if Micah is sent away? That old lady hasn't got good sense!"

"No," Pierce agreed, staring at the glass. "She's old and not too bright and she's got too much pride on too little money, but it's a sis—" his tongue stumbled "—a singular thing: there's hardly a person in this town, white or black or halfbreed Injun, that doesn't *love* that certain old lady. Except you. And *no*body in town loves *you*. Also a singular thing. Here we are—"

The doctor's teeth clicked against the glass. He set it down, swallowed. His eyes were yellow in the corners, and he looked at Bailiss steadily, save for a slight trembling of his hands and head. "Here we are, heading just as certain as can be towards splitting the Union and having war with the Yankees—all over slavery—tied to it hand and foot—willing to die for it—economy bound up in it—sure in our own hearts that nature and justice and religion are for it—and yet, singular thing: nobody likes slave traders. Nobody likes them."

"Tell me something new." Bailiss drew his arms back to make room for his dinner. He ate noisily and with good appetite.

"Another thing," the doctor hunched forward in his seat, "that hasn't added to your current popularity is this business of Domino. In this, I feel, you made a mistake. *Caveat emptor* or not, you should've sold him farther away from here, much farther away, down to the rice fields somewhere, where his death would have been just a statistic in the overseer's annual report. Folks feel you've cheated Sam Worth. He's not one of your rich absentee owners who sits in town and lets some cheese-paring Yankee drive his Negroes. He only owns four or five, he and his boy work right alongside them in the field, pace them row for row."

Bailiss grunted, sopped up gravy.

"You've been defying public opinion for years now. There might come a time when you'd want good will. My advice to you—after all, your agent only paid $100 for Domino—is to settle with Worth for five hundred."

Bailiss wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He reached for his hat, put it on, left money on the table, and got up.

"Shoemaker, stick to your last," he said. Dr. Pierce shrugged. "Make that glass the final one. I want you at the jail tomorrow early so we can get the catalogue ready for the big sale next week. Hear?" The old man walked out, paying no attention to the looks or comments his passage caused . . .

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On his horse, Bailiss hesitated. The night was rather warm, with a hint of damp in the air. He decided to ride around for a while in the hope of finding a breeze stirring. As the horse ambled along from one pool of yellow gaslight to another, he ran through in his mind some phrases for inclusion in his catalogue. *Phyllis, prime woman, aged 25, can cook, sew, do fine ironing . . .*

When he had first begun in the trade, three out of every five Negroes had been named Cuffee, Cudjoe, or Quash. He'd heard these were days of the week in some African dialect. There was talk that the African slave trade might be legalized again. That would be a fine thing. But, sho, there was always such talk, on and off.

The clang of a hammer on an anvil reminded him that he was close to Black Micah's forge. As he rounded the corner, he saw Sam Worth's bandy-legged figure outlined against the light. One of the horses was unhitched from his wagon and awaited the shoe Micah was preparing for it.

A sudden determination came to Bailiss: he would settle with Worth about Domino. He hardly bothered to analyze his motives. Partly because his dinner was resting well and he felt comfortable and unexpectedly benevolent, partly because of some vague notion it would be the popular thing to do and popularity was a good thing to have before and during a big sale, he made up his mind to offer Worth $300. Well, maybe he would go as high as $350, but no more; a man had to make *some*thing out of a trade.

As he rode slowly up to the forge and stopped, the blacksmith paused in his hammering and looked out. Worth turned around. In the sudden silence Bailiss heard another horse approaching.

"I've come to settle with you," the slave trader said. Worth looked up at him, his eyes bloodshot. In a low, ugly voice Worth cursed him and reached his hand toward his rear pocket. It was obvious to Bailiss what Worth intended, so the slave trader quickly drew his own pistol and fired. His horse reared, a woman screamed—did *two* women scream? Without his meaning it, the other barrel of his pistol went off just as Worth fell.

"Fo' gawdsake, don't kill me, Mister Bailiss!" Micah cried. "Are you all right, Miss Elizabeth?" Worth's wife and Miss Whitford suddenly appeared from the darkness on the other side of the wagon. They knelt beside Worth.

Bailiss felt a numbing blow on his wrist, dropped his empty pistol, was struck again, and half fell, was half dragged, from his horse. A woman screamed again, men ran up—where had they all come from?

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Bailiss, pinned in the grip of someone he couldn't see, stood dazed.

"You infernal scoundrel, you shot that man in cold blood!" Old Major Jack Moran dismounted from his horse and flourished the riding crop with which he had struck Bailiss on the wrist.

"I never—he cussed me—he reached for his pistol—I only defended myself!"

Worth's wife looked up, tears streaking her heavy face. "He had no pistol," she said. "I made him leave it home."

"You said, 'I've come to get you,' and you shot him point-blank!" the old major's voice trumpeted.

"He tried to shoot Miss Whitford, too!" someone said. Other voices added that Captain Carter, the high sheriff's chief deputy, was coming. Bodies pressed against Bailiss, faces glared at him, fists were waved before him.

"It wasn't like that at all!" he cried.

Deputy Carter came up on the gallop, flung the reins of his black mare to eager outthrust hands, jumped off, and walked over to Worth.

"How was it, then?" a scornful voice asked Bailiss.

"I rode up. I says, 'I've come to settle with you.' He cussed at me, low and mean, and he reached for his hip pocket."

In every face he saw disbelief.

"Major Jack's an old man," Bailiss faltered. "He heard it wrong. He—"

"Heard it good enough to hang you!"

Bailiss looked desperately around. Carter rose from his knees and the crowd parted. "Sam's dead, ma'am," he said. "I'm sorry." Mrs. Worth's only reply was a low moan. The crowd growled. Captain Carter turned and faced Bailiss, whose eyes looked at him for a brief second, then turned frantically away. And then Bailiss began to speak anxiously, so anxiously that his words came out a babble. His arms were pinioned and he could not point, but he thrust his head toward the forge where the blacksmith was still standing—standing silently.

"Micah," Bailiss stuttered. "Ask Micah!"

Micah saw it, he wanted to say—wanted to shout it. Micah was next to Worth, Micah heard what I really said. He's younger than the major, his hearing is good. He saw Worth reach—

Captain Carter placed his hand on Bailiss and spoke, but Bailiss did not hear him. The whole night had suddenly fallen silent for

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him, except for his own voice, saying something (it seemed long ago) to young lawyer Wickerson.

"It makes no difference what Micah saw! It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! And property can't testify!"

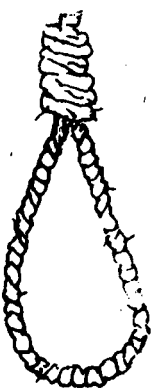
They tied Bailiss's hands and heaved him onto his horse.

"He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of—can't inherit—can't bequeath—can neither sue nor prosecute—"

Bailiss turned his head as they started to ride away. He looked at Micah and their eyes met. Micah knew.

"It's a basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave!"

Someone held the reins of old man Bailiss's horse. From now on he moved only as others directed. The lights around the forge receded. Darkness surrounded him. The necessity of his condition was upon him.



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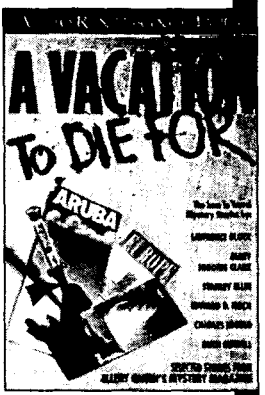

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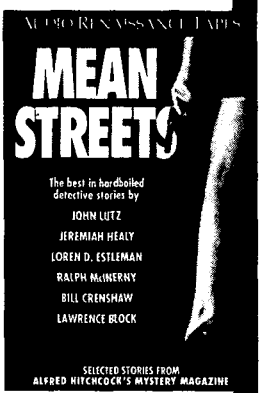

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

This column has always been devoted to the contents of books, not to news of the publishing world. But *EQMM*'s 50th anniversary year has seen the demise of one of the mystery field's few longer-lived institutions, and its passing should not go unremarked.

Publishers' mystery imprints have come and gone—remember Dodd, Mead's Red Badge, Simon and Schuster's Inner Sanctum, Putnam's Red Mask, Bobbs-Merrill's Black Bat?—but Doubleday's Crime Club both preceded and outlasted them all. The Crime Club gunman has been a recognized symbol for mystery fiction since 1928. In its early years, such major writers as Mignon G. Eberhart, Anthony Berkeley, H. C. Bailey, Margery Allingham, and Rufus King were published in the imprint. Names like Leslie Charteris, Aaron Marc Stein, and Doris Miles Disney contributed for decades. Recent years have seen fewer top names under the Crime Club banner, along with a greater and greater reliance on British imports to fill the lists and a dependence on library sales to the exclusion of much effort to publicize the line, but even in the last decade or two a scattering of major American names (e.g. John Ball, William L. DeAndrea, Isaac Asimov) have joined some top British practitioners (e.g. H. R. F. Keating, Ruth Rendell, Anthony Price, E. X. Ferrars, June Thomson) to keep the imprint alive.

The demise of Crime Club does not indicate any loss of interest in mystery fiction by the publishers, now corporately linked with Bantam, but rather a desire to build up a new imprint, combining names already published by Bantam with some of the Crime Club regulars. Below are two early examples of the Perfect Crime line, both solidly in the whodunit tradition, both by writers heretofore published in paperback original, and otherwise completely dissimilar.

*** David Handler: *The Woman Who Fell From Grace,* Doubleday/Perfect Crime, $17. When ghost writer Stewart Hoag gets the job of writing the sequel to *Oh, Shenandoah,* a *Gone with the Wind*-ish popular novel and film of fifty years before, he must also deal with the long-dead author's troublesome heirs and solve a number of murders, some contemporary and some a half century old. This is a highly entertaining and well-crafted novel, though his relationship with his basset hound Lulu and some easy sentimentality at the end don't serve to make smart-ass Hoagy any more likeable. (His previous case, *The Man Who Would Be F. Scott Fitzgerald,* won the Edgar for best paperback original of 1990.)

*** Joseph Telushkin: *An Eye for an Eye,* Doubleday/Perfect Crime,

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$17.00. Bearing comparison with Harry Kemelman's series about Rabbi Small, the third novel about Rabbi Daniel Winter includes both moral and ethical conundrums —was the father of a murdered girl justified in taking her killer's life when the justice system let him off too easily?—and some fascinating insights into Jewish marriage law. From the dedication onward, it's clear Rabbi Telushkin has a sermon for the reader—and that a writer with a different viewpoint on law and justice could have stacked the cards differently—but his preaching impulse does not detract from some expert plotting and characterization. (Discussing Telushkin's first novel in his essay on Jewish detective fiction in *Synod of Sleuths: Essays on Judeo-Christian Detective Fiction* (Scarecrow Press, 1990), edited by Martin H. Greenberg and this reviewer, James Yaffe finds Rabbi Winter an overly idealized "wish-fulfillment" character, "Blake Carrington with a Talmudic education." This novel finds him considerably humanized.)

*** Douglas C. Jones: *The Search for Temperance Moon,* Holt, $22.50. In Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1892, upscale madam Jewel Moon asks former U.S. Marshal Oscar Schiller to find out who killed her mother, Temperance Moon, in the Indian Nations. While this *is* a detective story, establishing its whodunit situation on the second page, it is more successful as a historical novel. The author has a gift for description and characterization, and the well-observed details of frontier life compensate for the leisurely pace. Schiller shares with another noted late 19th-century sleuth a liking for cocaine (then legal).

*** David Williams: *Prescription for Murder,* St. Martin's, $15.95. Like Emma Lathen's American John Putnam Thatcher series, the British Mark Treasure novels feature a banker-detective and a different business background in each book. This time it's pharmaceuticals, as the Closter Drug Company, on the brink of releasing a medication to cure migraine, faces a hostile takeover. Williams does a typically sound plotting job, though similarly named characters (Larden and Bodlin) may cause readers some difficulty.

*** Bill Crider: *Dead on the Island,* Walker, $18.95. The prolific Crider adds to his established series characters (Sheriff Dan Rhodes and English professor Carl Burns) Texas private eye Truman Smith, who has quit the sleuthing game because of his failure to find his own vanished sister but reluctantly accepts an old friend's request to look for another missing girl. Though some of the elements are familiar ones, Crider's customary humor and the fresh, vividly realized Galveston background give this book its edge.

*** Ronald Levitsky: *The Love That Kills,* Scribners, $18.95. Nate Rosen, civil liberties lawyer for an ACLU-like organization, comes to Musket Shoals, Virginia to represent the head of the racist Guardians of an Undefiled Nation on a charge of murdering a Vietnamese

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woman. He and ecology-minded prosecutor Jimmy Wilkes join forces in the cause of justice. Though the conventional windup does not live up to the promise of the early chapters, Levitsky's prose and characterization mark him a new writer to watch.

*** Erle Stanley Gardner: *Honest Money,* Carroll & Graf, $18.95. Lawyer Ken Corning, hero of these six novelettes from 1932 and 1933 issues of *Black Mask,* is the precursor of Perry Mason. The fast-moving stories have the pace, devious plotting, and legal ins and outs of the Mason novels, and Corning's relationship with plucky secretary Helen Vail foreshadows Mason and Della Street. The main difference: we never see Corning at work in the courtroom.

** Sarah Shankman: *She Walks in Beauty,* Pocket Books, $21.00. My reaction to this one is highly mixed. It has a notably silly "suspense" prologue scarcely related to the rest of the book. It involves a series detective in reporter Samantha Adams, but there is precious little detecting done, and the sprawling mystery plot is unsatisfying. On the other hand, the background of the Miss America pageant is exploited for all it's worth, and there are some involving characters and well wrought scenes. Whether you think the pageant is a great American institution or a tasteless, anachronistic exploitation of female flesh, you should appreciate Shankman's even-handed treatment. Who will win the prize creates much more suspense and interest than any of the criminal goings on.

** Earl Emerson: *Yellow Dog Party,* Morrow, $19.00. Four high school buddies, twenty years after graduation, ask Seattle private eye Thomas Black to locate their dream girls and set up dates. With its intriguing plot premise, some good writing, and early-chapter menace, this one starts well but loses its impetus around the midway point. Black and lawyer/clown Kathy Birchfield are interesting enough characters singly, but their goofy relationship has to be one of the most tiresome in mystery fiction.

** Phyllis Horn: *Lodestar,* Naiad, $8.95. A sinister quasi-religious commune called Enlightenment is practicing drug-aided mind control, but that's only one element of this everything-but-the-kitchen-sink lesbian thriller, the second to feature Judge Alice Cutter and FBI agent Billie Robinson. The good guys (mostly female) and bad guys (mostly male) are delineated as sharply as in any B-movie western, and the plot, though often silly, is oddly gripping.

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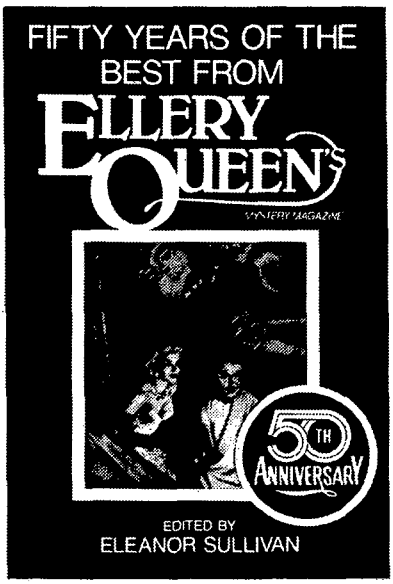

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a *NEW* Michael Vlado story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The new story in Mr. Hoch's Gypsy series is set at Christmas-time and should whet your appetite for our special Christmas issue in Mid-December . . .

RETURN OF THE GYPSY

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Segar, late of the Romanian government militia and now an official of the ruling National Salvation Front, heard about the return of Michael Vlado on Christmas Eve of 1990. He was an old friend of Michael's and therefore he wasn't pleased to hear the news from a low-ranking civil servant whose duty it was to facilitate the expulsion of Gypsies from the country.

"Why did he come back?" Vortosu asked. "What does he want?"

"Michael Vlado has only been away for a short time," Segar reminded him. "His wife still lives in the mountain village of Gravita. His people are there. He is their king."

"King of the Gypsies!" Vortosu scoffed. He was a slim, unpleasant man with bad teeth and a perpetual body odor. Segar avoided him whenever possible. "Homeless wanderers who should be driven from our country! They're nothing but thieves and fortune-tellers."

"Michael Vlado's tribe has farmed the land and raised horses for generations," Segar responded. "They are not nomadic."

"In Romania all Gypsies are nomadic now. The government is seeing to it," Vortosu said drily.

"That's why Vlado's been away. He visited Italy and Austria, attending a symposium in Vienna on Gypsy culture and language. There are refugee centers there for displaced Gypsy families forced

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to flee from Eastern Europe. He is seeking a place for his people if they're forced to move."

Vortosu looked skeptical. "I find it odd that he returned now."

"It's Christmas Eve. He's returned home to be with his wife and friends. Is that so unusual?"

Vortosu sorted through some papers on his desk. "You are aware that Michael Vlado was a member of a delegation that visited our deposed monarch in Switzerland last January. That trip was completely unauthorized, and possibly harmful."

"In what way?" Segar asked.

"It may have encouraged the ex-King to think he could return."

"Is there any evidence of this?" The news was a surprise to Segar, and he doubted its truth. "The Monarchist Party's candidates did poorly in the May elections."

"The government has received information that the former King may be flying here from Switzerland tomorrow for a Christmas visit to test the waters. Isn't it likely that his namesake Michael Vlado has returned to meet with him?"

"I'm certain he knows nothing of it."

Vortosu nodded. "Of course. But don't you think you should spend Christmas with your old friend up in the hills?"

Captain Segar was not technically under Vortosu's command, but the idea seemed like a good one. It had been months since he'd seen Michael or visited the village of Gravita. What better time than Christmas? It was not as if he had a family of his own any more. His wife was gone and his children grown, scattered. "A splendid suggestion," he agreed at once.

"If he attempts to meet with the former monarch, have him arrested."

Segar left the office without replying.

The drive into the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains was always a pleasant one for Captain Segar, even in winter when many of the trees were bare. Though the forests on the lower slopes were mainly birch, beech, and oak, he could see the green of pine and spruce trees at the higher altitudes. He would not be going that far up, since Michael's village was on the edge of the mountains.

It was a sunny day with temperatures hovering in the mid-thirties. When he reached Gravita, many of the Gypsies were outside. Some chopped firewood for the long months ahead, while others worked out their horses. The first familiar face he saw was that of

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Michael's wife, Rosanna. She was a quiet, attractive woman in her early forties, content to tell fortunes with tarot cards and carve little wooden animals to be sold at the village shops.

"Hello, Captain Segar!" she called out, walking over to his car. "It's many months since you've visited us."

"Almost a year, but Michael's been away. I hear now that he's returned."

"Only a few days ago. I'm thankful he's here for Christmas." She was carrying a small basket of her carved wooden animals and she showed them to him. "There's always a demand at Christmas-time."

"I like that hedgehog. What's its price?"

She hesitated only an instant before handing it to him. "For you, Captain Segar, it is a Christmas gift."

"No, no! I couldn't—"

"I insist, and so would Michael. Come with me to the shop and then you can drive me back to the house. Michael's working with the horses, getting reacquainted with them after all his months away."

"Thank you for the gift," he told her. "I'll treasure it."

They dropped the other wooden animals at the shop on the main road and then proceeded up the hill to the Vlado farm. He could see Michael from a distance, standing with his favorite horse. He was dressed in a high-necked red tunic and dark pants. A jacket he'd been wearing was tossed casually over a tree stump.

They embraced warmly and Michael said, "Segar! I've missed you, old friend. How's the new government treating you?"

"About as they treat the Gypsies, but there's some hope of improvement soon. It's a time of transition, and such times are always painful."

"You must remain with us for Christmas. It's a perfect opportunity for us to become reacquainted."

Segar looked glum. "I have to tell you, old friend, that the new government has taken a special interest in you since your secret journey to Switzerland last January."

Michael had picked up a stiff brush he used for grooming the horses. Now he stopped his activity and stared at Segar. "The King?"

"The ex-King—the deposed monarch. No one wants King Michael again. Look at the results of the last election."

"That may be true, but there was no harm in a delegation visiting him."

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"You may have encouraged him to return. One of the officials believes your own return at this time is part of a plot involving a Christmas visit by the old monarch."

"Christmas? Michael is coming here, to Romania?"

Segar nodded. "I have it on good authority that he'll fly here from Switzerland tomorrow."

"Good authority? Does that mean someone has already betrayed him?"

"Do you know about this visit, Michael?"

He shook his head. "I've had no contact with him since January."

"But you traveled extensively in Europe during the year. They know how easy it would have been for you to slip into Switzerland for a day or two."

"I didn't."

Segar nodded. "I believe you. Others may not."

Over dinner the conversation turned to more pleasant topics as Rosanna filled in her husband on the village events of the past few months. Then they went off to a Christmas party at one of the other Gypsy farms, where a large number of children added to the seasonal festivities. Segar noticed that Michael seemed quieter than usual—more withdrawn, as if deep in thought. It was only when some of the smaller children bounced on his lap that he was forced back to the present.

"I'm worried," he told Segar as they strolled through the chill night air on the way back to the farm. It was after midnight and the sky was alive with stars. It would be a good night for flying.

"About the former king?"

"Yes. If he's really flying here for Christmas, he may be putting himself in grave danger."

"He's survived danger before. He's sixty-nine years old and he's lived an adventurous life—first helping the coup that toppled the pro-Nazi dictator Antonescu from power in 1944 and later test-piloting airplanes in the United States. Along the way, he found time to run a poultry farm in Britain, start an electronics company, and work as a stockbroker."

"Still, this is different. Did he notify the government of his visit?"

Segar nodded. "Several days ago. They advised him not to come."

"Perhaps he won't," Michael said, but in his heart he knew the former King wanted nothing more than a return to his homeland. Nothing would stop him from coming unless it was a bullet . . .

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Michael awakened early on Christmas morning. As he got out of bed, Rosanna stirred and asked what time it was. "Barely sunrise," he told her. "Go back to sleep for a bit."

He walked barefoot down the hall to the spare room where Captain Segar slept. As he entered, Segar's hand came out from under the pillow, holding a 9-mm. pistol of the sort he'd worn as a militia officer. When he recognized Michael, he laid the weapon aside. "You're up early."

Michael gestured toward the gun. "Such things are not needed here."

"It wasn't meant as protection against a Gypsy, old friend. These days I sleep with it always."

Michael sighed and sat at the edge of the bed. "You shouldn't work for a government you can't trust."

"I have nothing else. But tell me what brings you here so early."

"The other Michael, of course."

Segar smiled slightly. "The once and future King?"

"I think not. I only want to keep him alive."

Segar pulled on his underwear and reached for the pants he'd draped over a chair. "Let me make a telephone call to the Bucharest office. Where can I phone from on Christmas Day?"

"Right here," Michael told him with a touch of pride. "While I was away, Rosanna had a phone line run up to the house from the center of the village. I should have had one long ago."

"You've entered the Twentieth Century at last," Segar marveled.

Rosanna had arisen despite Michael's urging that she stay in bed, and by the time they went downstairs she was making breakfast. Segar telephoned Bucharest and spoke quickly into the instrument. Michael could hear his excited voice. "When? What time? Are you certain? What are your orders?"

After he'd hung up, Michael asked, "What is it?"

"His leased jet arrives from Switzerland early this evening. It will be a private visit of twenty-four to thirty-six hours, going to the graves of his ancestors at the monastery in Curtea de Arges."

"We must go there," Michael decided at once. "Or better yet, to the Bucharest airport. His life could be in grave danger."

As soon as they'd finished breakfast, they were on the road, heading back through the hills on the route that Segar had driven the previous day. As they drove, the captain told him, "I was sent to prevent a meeting between you two, and now I'm driving you to the airport."

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"You know his life could be in danger. No one in the present government wants him back."

"Of course not. But he is no threat. The May elections showed that. His popular support is very low."

Michael sighed. "Romania's leaders today are many of the same members of the former Communist Party."

"Who else is there?"

"What have they done since they took power? Gypsies are being driven out, children are suffering, babies are being sold like a commodity to childless foreign couples."

Segar nodded. "Many Americans and Canadians come here every week, seeking babies to adopt. There is a great deal of money to be made by unscrupulous middlemen. My office is working on that very problem at present."

The drive to the city took only a couple of hours, and they arrived before noon. Shops and offices were closed for the Christmas holiday, but they found a hotel dining room that was open for lunch. It was as they were leaving the hotel that Segar suddenly tensed, his eyes on a man hurrying along the opposite side of the street.

"There's someone I've been looking for," he said, breaking into a run that left Michael standing at the curb.

Segar's long legs carried him across the narrow street almost before the other man knew what was happening. He turned at the last moment and tried to dodge, but Segar already had a grip on his collar. Michael crossed the street to join them.

"Let go of me!" the man shouted as Segar tightened his grip.

"Relax, Karl, I just want to ask you a few questions. Michael, this is one of your people. His name is Karl Gurbet. I've been looking for him."

Gurbet was a popular tribal name among Gypsies, though Michael had never known it in these parts. "Where are you from?" he asked the man in Romany.

"I come from the Balkans." He was olive-skinned and probably in his forties, dressed in a western suit complete with necktie.

"He is one of the baby-brokers we spoke of earlier," Segar told Michael. "He dresses up to impress the Americans."

"I do nothing wrong."

"You received twelve thousand American dollars from a New York City couple to arrange the adoption of a two-month-old baby girl."

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"It is an expensive undertaking," Karl Gurbet replied.

"How much of that did you keep?" When the Gypsy did not answer immediately, Segar gave him a shake. "How much?"

"Perhaps three thousand. I have expenses, too."

Segar turned to Michael. "This is what I deal with. People are profiteering off the plight of the poor. A family will sometimes sell their children just to buy a new television set or video camera."

"I know nothing of that," Gurbet insisted.

"Give me the names of the people you deal with."

"I work alone, trying to make an honest lei or two—"

"More like a dishonest dollar."

Michael could see this was getting nowhere. "Let me speak with him," he suggested to Segar. "Wait for us in the hotel lobby."

When the captain had retreated, Michael steered the Gypsy down the street to a little square at the intersection of several streets. There was virtually no traffic on this Christmas afternoon, though off in the distance he could see people exiting a church after one of the late Masses.

"Why do you work at this dirty business?" Michael asked Gurbet.

The man shrugged. "There is money to be made. Why should I spend my life traveling in caravans with fortune-tellers and knife fighters? I was made for better things."

"You're working a con of some sort. Even the profits to be made from selling babies wouldn't satisfy a Rom like you."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I've known your sort all my life," Michael said, leaning close to the man. "You give our people a bad name. Tell what you know about this baby business and I'll try to get you a break with the authorities."

Gurbet smiled slyly. "I make my own breaks. Just keep Segar off my back."

"You're treading dangerous ground, my friend."

They went back to join Segar in the hotel lobby and Michael made a gesture to indicate failure. "All right," Segar told the man. "We'll be watching you. If you try anything funny, I'll personally see that you're locked away in prison for the next twenty years."

The man muttered something and scurried from the lobby. Michael watched him go, then turned to Segar. "I'm sorry I couldn't get anything out of him. You're correct in your suspicions, though. He's up to no good."

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"Scum like him don't deserve prison. I'd be doing the nation a favor if I shot him dead."

"Hold on. He's bringing happiness to some people."

"So are drug dealers."

Michael looked at him. "What is it, Segar? What does that man mean to you?"

The captain looked away. "Nothing. He means nothing to me." Then after a moment he began talking, more to himself than to Michael. "Like yourself, I was born during the war. My family was poor, and after the war things were even worse for a time. There was a baby sister I barely remember. Many years later, I learned my parents had sold her because they couldn't afford both of us. I was the boy, and I could help out on the farm. They kept me and sold her."

"I never knew."

"Of course not. I tell no one this story."

"Your family isn't unique. There are Gypsy families who have sold their young, too."

The captain remained silent, staring at the floor and shaking his head. Michael finally realized the hatred he must harbor for men like Karl Gurbet. At last he said, "Come, Michael. We still have a job to do here. The King's plane will arrive in a few hours."

The airport was out beyond the city's suburbs, and Segar drove a bit too fast through the narrow, crooked streets at the outskirts of Bucharest, oblivious to its picturesque charms. They passed the racetrack and the public gardens, said to be patterned after the Champs Elysees in Paris. Presently the airport itself came into view. The winter sun was already low on the horizon and Michael wondered how soon the plane from Switzerland would be landing.

As they left the car in the parking lot, Segar repeated what little he'd learned about the visit. "The former King Michael will be traveling with his wife and one of their daughters. A second daughter is already here. She arrived a week ago and no doubt will meet the family at the airport. They will leave immediately for the monastery at Curtea de Arges, where the family is buried. A departure tomorrow night or Thursday is expected."

"Any others in the party?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I seek a Judas, a betrayer."

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"His personal secretary, a man named Jules Raymond, is traveling with them."

"I see."

"There may also be a family friend, Countess Maille."

"They will travel in two cars?"

"I imagine so."

It was shortly after dark when Captain Segar received word that the private jet had landed at the far end of the main runway and taxied to a hangar used by government planes. "I should have known they wouldn't come to the main terminal. We must hurry, Michael."

They commandeered an electrically driven airport vehicle and headed toward the distant hangar. Romanian border police were already on the scene. "I know the man in charge," Segar said. "Let me do the talking."

"With pleasure," Michael agreed.

He was a young lieutenant named Gotfreed who'd worked under Segar in the old militia. At the first sight of his former superior, he snapped a fancy salute and told him somewhat breathlessly, "It's the old King come back to claim his throne!"

"Hardly that," Segar replied. "How many are in his party?"

"There are six on board, including the pilot. Michael and his wife, their daughter, their good friend, Countess Maille, Michael's secretary and bodyguard, Jules Raymond, and the pilot, an Englishman named Saxon."

"Will you let them through?"

"The authorities have granted him an entrance visa, but they've kept his passport to give it an additional stamp."

"Then they're still in the hangar?"

"They were a few minutes ago."

Segar and Michael hurried into the hangar. A soldier holding an automatic weapon blocked their way until Segar identified himself. Inside, the first person Michael saw was a strikingly handsome woman wrapped in a white-mink coat. She was no longer young, but she carried herself with the full awareness that her beauty could still turn men's heads.

Segar identified himself and she responded, "I'm Countess Maille, a close friend of the royal family."

"Romania has no royal family," Segar reminded her. "The only King Michael is this man here, and he is King of the Gypsies."

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She waved her hand dismissively. "Be that as it may, the family is back for a private visit. There will be a service tomorrow morning at the family church in Curtea de Arges. We want no trouble—no interference by the government."

Segar nodded. "I would like to speak with your Michael before they depart."

She hesitated, and at that moment Lieutenant Gotfreed hurried up to them. "The King and his family have left the airport! They didn't wait for me to return their passports!"

"What's this?"

The young officer, fearful of being blamed for some error in judgment, quickly explained. "They entered the country using Danish diplomatic passports. Instead of waiting until the passports were legally stamped by the border police, they left the airport in a car supplied by their other daughter, who was waiting here for them."

"They've done nothing wrong," Countess Maille insisted. "The government was notified in advance of their visit."

"They were not cleared by the border police," Gotfreed answered with a scowl. "This must be reported."

As he hurried off, Segar motioned the countess aside. Michael followed as if he'd been invited, too. "You must realize the royal family could be in deep danger. Certain elements of the National Salvation Front would like to see him imprisoned or even killed."

"For what reason? He opposed Hitler. He opposed Communism." She was standing tall and dignified, unshakable in her strength.

"That was a long time ago. No one wants him back now."

Michael intervened. "They have gone to the monastery?"

"Yes."

"Will you follow them?"

"If I'm allowed to."

"Who is in the car?"

"The King, his wife, and two daughters. Also his secretary, Raymond. I was to follow in a second car if I could."

"And if not?"

She motioned toward a slender man wearing a braided cap and jacket. "Saxon is our pilot. He will remain here with me overnight."

At the mention of his name, Saxon strode over. "Do you need me, Countess?"

"No, no—I will call you if I do."

He was a dark-haired man in his thirties who spoke with a British accent. "May I check the weather forecast for our departure tomorrow night?"

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"It is more likely to be Thursday morning. Go ahead, check on it."

When the pilot had departed, Segar asked, "Is he another hired bodyguard?"

"Hardly. He came with the plane, which is a chartered jet."

There was a growing flurry of activity inside the big hangar as word spread that the monarch's party had departed by car, ignoring orders to remain there for clearance. Presently, Lieutenant Gotfreed returned.

"The situation is very bad," he told them. "There's been a tip that the former monarch is carrying contraband in his car, destined for rebels in the mountains. A roadblock's been set up to keep the party from reaching their destination."

Michael turned to Captain Segar. "This whole thing's a plot to kill him! Can't you see it? We must go after them and pray we can overtake them!"

"If you go, I'm going, too," the countess decided.

Segar issued quick orders to the lieutenant. "I want a car brought around at once, with a full tank of gas."

"I'll need authorization."

"This is your authorization," Segar said, speaking softly as he slid a hand inside his coat. The gesture had the proper intimidating effect.

"Right away, sir." Gotfreed said.

Segar turned to Michael and allowed himself a slight smile. "It may be too late, but we'll give it a good try."

The night sky had clouded over, and without the moon it was a dark drive northwest out of Bucharest toward their destination. "How long?" Countess Maille asked as they started out.

"At night, probably close to three hours," Segar told her. "But we may find them before that."

"You mean if they were stopped by a roadblock."

"Yes."

As they drove on, the silence seemed oppressive. Presently the countess shifted around in the front seat to face Michael in the rear. "You are a Gypsy king?"

"Yes. I was a member of the delegation that visited the monarch in Switzerland last January."

"He was very pleased by that visit. He told me—"

"Someone's coming up behind us," Segar warned.

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It was true—there was another car on the nearly deserted road, coming fast as if trying to overtake them. "Police?" Michael asked.

"They would be flashing red lights by now." Segar reached under his coat and passed the 9-mm. pistol back to Michael. "Keep it ready, in case you need it."

The car, a little red Italian make, overtook them with ease and started edging toward them. Michael saw the face on the passenger side as the window rolled down and the barrel of a gun appeared. It was the face of a man he'd never seen before, who looked as if he was enjoying his work. Michael shot out the side rear window of the red car and the man dove for cover. Segar came down hard on the accelerator and they shot ahead of their pursuers. "My God!" the countess gasped.

"Good work!" Segar told him. "They're falling behind. They have no stomach for victims who shoot back."

"Who were they? Government?"

"Perhaps. Or someone else. It seems the former monarch has many enemies."

They drove for a time in silence, with Michael casting a backward glance at the road every few minutes. There seemed to be no one behind them now. The Countess had said very little—perhaps fearing for her life—but finally she broke her silence. "I see lights up ahead."

"It's the roadblock," Segar decided.

He slowed the car and Michael could make out the shapes of a highway patrol car and an Army truck blocking the road. A large black limousine was pulled off to one side and an Army officer was shining a powerful flashlight into the open trunk.

Countess Maille was out of their car in an instant, running toward the limousine. Segar followed, warning Michael, "You'd best remain in the car. The presence of a Gypsy might only complicate matters."

The appearance of Countess Maille brought King Michael himself out of the vehicle, and he embraced her tenderly. His wife and two daughters appeared then, too, while Segar spoke with the officers conducting the search. A large box of some sort had been produced from the car's oversized trunk, and one of the armed men kept gesturing toward it. He reached inside and took out something to show Segar. It appeared to be a small radio receiver, although the former King merely looked at it and shook his head, disclaiming all knowledge.

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Presently Segar came back to the car to inform Michael: "They found a carton of two-way radios in the trunk. The officer in charge claims they're meant for monarchist guerrillas in the mountains."

"What does Michael say?"

"He denies it, of course. His daughter hired the car in Bucharest yesterday. Someone must have planted the radios there."

"His visit wasn't announced in advance. It had to be someone with knowledge of it."

"That gets us back to the government again."

"What will they do with him?" Michael asked.

"The radios will be confiscated, of course. And the officers say now that he'll only be allowed to continue to the monastery if they accompany him."

"Then he is under arrest?"

"Not officially. Not yet."

"Does he know I'm here?"

"I believe the countess told him. He's coming back to the car."

Michael got out to greet the man whose name he bore.

They proceeded on to Curtea de Arges after that. The town held little except the monastery and the family church where the service would be held the following morning. Michael and Segar were given rooms in the old building, behind vine-covered walls. The monk who showed Michael the way promised that the view from his window would be spectacular by daylight.

He didn't lie. Michael was awakened by the winter sun through his window and looked out to see the Carpathian mountains in the distance, their snowy peaks reaching toward the few fluffy clouds that dotted the sky. He'd been awake only a few minutes when there was a knocking on the door. He opened it to see the stocky figure of Jules Raymond, King Michael's secretary.

"I hope you slept well, Michael Vlado. The King sends his regards and invites you and Captain Segar to join the royal family at the private service for their ancestors this morning."

"It would be a great honor," Michael said.

The service, conducted by a priest of the Orthodox Church, was simple and dignified. A large breakfast followed, and for a time it seemed as if they were in another world, away in the vast mountains, free from the pressure of politics.

"He knows he must go back to Switzerland," Countess Maille told Michael at one point. "Perhaps he had hoped for a popular uprising,

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but that was not to be. This is a different age, and the monarchy is dead, even a democratic monarchy such as he proposed. The people of Romania must struggle through it on their own, for better or worse."

"When will he return?"

"We leave for Bucharest this afternoon. If the government decides to arrest him because of those radios—"

"I can't imagine them doing that," Michael said.

"There are powerful forces at work. Those men in the car were trying to kill us last night."

The priest and monks assembled to bid goodbye, and their two cars pulled away in the early afternoon. The black limousine led the way, with Segar and Michael following. This time Raymond rode with them, and he made no pretense about hiding the gun he carried under his coat. With Segar's weapon, they seemed to be safe enough, though when the government cars intercepted them just outside the monastery walls there was a moment of tension.

"They're only escorting us," Raymond decided.

"Or arresting you," Segar corrected. "We won't know which until we reach Bucharest."

A few flurries began to fall as they approached the suburbs of the city. Already it was nearly night, and the convoy headed directly for the hangar. Michael could see several police cars on the scene. "Are they waiting for us?"

"I don't know," Segar said. The convoy had stopped and he got out of the vehicle. He returned several minutes later and as Michael rolled down the window he leaned into the car and said, "There's been a killing at the hangar. A man was found stabbed to death. They haven't identified him yet."

Raymond slipped out of the car, moving quickly for a large man. "I must be with the King."

As Segar turned away, Michael asked, "Will the King be arrested?"

"I'm afraid so."

Lieutenant Gotfreed was awaiting them, and reported at once. "I found the body in the men's room thirty minutes ago. We have the building surrounded."

"Let me see it."

Michael followed along. The door to the men's room was propped open and someone had thrown a sheet over the dead man. Gotfreed bent and lifted a corner of it. "Do you know him?"

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"Yes," Segar said. "I know him. He's a baby broker named Karl Gurbet—a Gypsy. I spoke with him yesterday."

Gotfreed turned to stare at Michael. "Perhaps you can help us in our investigation, if this is a Gypsy crime."

"I never met the man before yesterday."

"Are there any clues?" Segar asked.

"Only this bit of gold braid, clutched in one hand."

Segar grunted. "Torn from a uniform such as some police and Army officers wear."

"And one other," Michael said. "Where is King Michael's private jet?"

"On the runway, awaiting his arrival. They plan an immediate departure, except that we have orders for Michael's arrest."

"Has the plane been cleared by Romanian customs?"

"They travel with diplomatic passports. The plane has immunity from the border guards."

Michael broke into a run. "Hurry! We must stop it!"

Segar ran after him, out of the hangar, across the darkened tarmac toward the lights of the private jet. Michael reached the plane first and started up the steps to the cabin. "No guns!" he told Segar. "Tell them not to fire at the plane no matter what happens!"

The pilot, Saxon, met him in the cabin doorway. "We're preparing for takeoff—you can't come on."

Michael's fist connected with his jaw and he tumbled backward into the aisle. He stepped over the fallen man and saw a woman in a nurse's uniform. Already he could hear the cries of the babies.

"Come aboard, Segar!" he called out. "It's in your hands now!"

There were twenty babies on board, and after they'd been removed and Captain Segar had placed Saxon under arrest, Michael took time to enlighten his old friend.

"At upward of twelve thousand dollars each, twenty Romanian babies could bring close to a quarter of a million dollars—perhaps more—in Switzerland. Saxon knew it was a diplomatic flight that wouldn't be searched. All he and Gurbet had to do was frame King Michael somehow so that his party would be imprisoned, at least temporarily. Then he would take off with a supposedly empty plane, flying the valuable babies back to Switzerland."

"You knew it that easily, from the braid?"

"I did remember Saxon's braided cap and jacket. But there was also the matter of the car that followed us last evening. Someone

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had to order it done, someone at the hangar who knew the instant we left and telephoned the gunmen. If it was Lieutenant Gotfreed or the other police, they'd have used a different method. They'd already put up a roadblock, after all. The timing pointed to a member of the royal party. Raymond was traveling with them and the countess was with us. The only one to remain behind at the hangar was Saxon. I was bothered by him for that reason, but I couldn't put my finger on the crime, if any. Saxon had no obvious ties to the Romanian government."

"His only tie was to money," Segar said. "After Gurbet and the nurse delivered the babies to the plane, Saxon killed him rather than pay him his share of the money. There are a number of large metal food containers on the plane. The babies were smuggled aboard in those."

It was the following morning before the government completed its investigation and agreed with Segar's findings that the radios had been planted in the limousine's trunk. Another pilot had been flown in, and shortly after ten o'clock the royal party was ready for departure.

Michael Vlado was at the hangar to see them off. It was Countess Maille who came over to thank him on behalf of the family. They stood together watching the former King board the plane, and the countess said, "He's as much a Gypsy as you are, Michael Vlado—a man without a home, a King without a country. His life has been a succession of travels, a variety of occupations. For these brief hours he returned here. Now he must leave, and I doubt if you will see him again."

As the plane took off into the morning sky, Michael stood on the ground and waved. He couldn't tell if the other Gypsy returned his wave.

"Q"

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"The Game's Afoot, Mon!"

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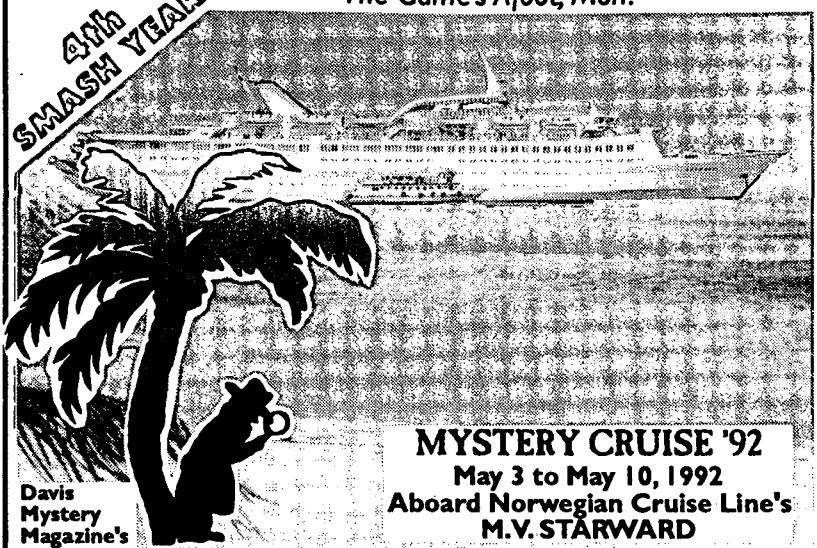

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The receiver of one of the pay phones was off the hook. Garth picked it up. "Frederickson."

"Kill him before he kills you." The voice was flat and oddly muffled, as if the man was making an effort to disguise it . . .

FIRST STRIKE

by GEORGE C. CHESBRO

The substance that had once crippled his mind and body had been gone from his system for years, but Garth Frederickson had been permanently changed. Some layer of emotional insulation had been stripped from him, leaving him rawly sensitive to emotional and spiritual signals sent by others. He experienced others' anguish and need as physical discomfort, a shortness of breath, and in the presence of people who would do harm he experienced a taste in his mouth not dissimilar to bitter chocolate. The poison's strange legacy was a sometimes cruel gift that he didn't question and couldn't explain—not to Mary Tree, his wife, and not even to his brother, who tended to make jokes about his "nose for evil."

The Broadway actor in centerfield caught the fly ball hit by the ballet dancer and threw home, but he was too late to prevent one of the three local politicians on hand for the celebrity softball game to benefit the sloop *Clearwater* and its efforts to clean up the Hudson River from tagging up at third base and coming home. With two outs for Mary's team, one of the five film actors who lived in Cairn stepped up to the plate, while one of the two film directors who were his neighbors prepared to pitch to him. The rock star coaching at third base, virtually unrecognizable without his elaborate hairpiece, shouted encouragement.

From his seat at the top of a bleacher section on the west side of the high-school athletic field, Garth watched as a short, husky man, incongruously dressed in an ill-fitting tan suit and wearing a black-leather beret, emerged from the bleacher section on the north side and made his way around the cinder track toward Mary, who had come off the field after her turn at bat and was standing on the

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apron of the field autographing copies of her latest album that people had brought with them.

Garth, tasting bitter chocolate, was out of his seat and heading down toward the field as the stocky man in the baggy suit and black beret roughly shouldered his way through the knot of autograph seekers and thrust the bulky manila envelope he had been carrying into the hands of the startled singer, who shied and backed away a step. As the man reached out for Mary's wrist, Garth grabbed his shoulder, pulled him back, and spun him around. He found himself staring into pale-green eyes that first registered shock, then rage. A dark flush spread from his thick neck to his fleshy face, highlighting the alcohol-ruptured veins in his broad nose. He cursed in German.

"Security," Garth said evenly, using his free hand to display the card that identified him as a member of Cairn's auxiliary police force. "Wait your turn and keep your hands to yourself."

"Mind your business!" the man shouted in English laced with a heavy German accent. "Get your hand off me!"

"If you have something for my wife to sign, line up and wait with the others. If not, get the hell back to your seat. She's here to play softball. If you want to meet her, buy a ticket to the reception after the game."

The man reached into the sagging left-hand pocket of his suit jacket, withdrew a black snub-nosed revolver with an elongated skeleton grip, and pressed the bore against Garth's sternum.

Garth slowly released his grip on the man's shoulder and dropped his hand to his side as he calmly stared at his death in the pale-green eyes. He had always had an aversion to dying by accident—a bullet meant for someone else smashing into his brain, or being run over by a drunk driver—or by degrees his body and mind being slowly crushed by disease. Being shot by a psychopath at a fund-raising softball game was surely also an absurd way to die, but his instincts about the man had been correct. Now the man's instability and his potential for harm had been unmasked. With two Cairn policemen now flanking him, guns drawn and aimed at his head, Garth didn't think it likely that the man in the black beret would again be in a position to threaten Mary for a very long time, if ever.

Then the killing time passed, the murderous rage in the green eyes vanishing as suddenly as it had appeared, to be replaced by what might have been bemusement, and something else Garth couldn't read. The man took the gun away from Garth's chest and

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handed it by the barrel to Jake Goldberg, the Cairn policeman standing to his left. Instantly, Goldberg and Fred Searles, the second policeman, wrestled his hands behind his back, handcuffed him, and started to lead him away. Just before they disappeared around the end of a bleacher section, the man twisted his head around and smiled at Mary. "Please read what I gave you!" he called over his shoulder. "It will explain everything!"

It had happened so quickly that only the knot of autograph seekers had actually seen the confrontation, but these people were now talking excitedly to one another, and as word of the incident spread more and more heads began to turn in their direction. The action on the field had stopped and a few of the players were heading toward them.

Garth leaned close to Mary, who was white-faced with shock and breathing hoarsely. "You have to pull yourself together and get your team back on the field, love," he said in a gentle tone as he took the manila envelope from her trembling hands. "You don't want that guy interfering with what you all came here to do, and publicity about what happened will only encourage others like him. It's over. Go on, now."

The tall, lithe woman with the long whitish-blonde hair and piercingly blue eyes swallowed hard and nodded. She took a deep breath, then turned and, shouting and waving her arms, led her teammates out onto the field.

Garth headed back up to his seat in the bleachers, thinking that if living was a dangerous business that nobody survived anyway, it was even more dangerous for celebrities, where in any of the crowds constantly surrounding them might be the one person who would murder them for no other reason than that his victim was famous and he was not—as if the act of killing was some kind of mystical rite that would somehow magically confer the fame and power of the slain upon the slayer. A quick inspection of the contents of the manila envelope served to confirm Garth's suspicion that the man who had been taken away in handcuffs posed a very real threat to his wife.

During the reception that followed the game, Garth stayed back in the dim light of an alcove near the auxiliary bar of the Hudson Shore restaurant, closely watching the many well wishers who had paid for the privilege of being there as they flocked around Mary's table to speak to her, or ask for her autograph. In a way, Garth

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thought with a grim smile, he could almost sympathize with the man in the black beret, for he, too, had been obsessed with the transcendent beauty and sensuality of Mary Tree for more than twenty years before they had actually met and fallen in love.

When the others were finally gone, he went over to the table, sat down next to his wife, and brushed his lips against her cheek. "You all done good, babe," he said. "Counting the proceeds from the reception, you and your friends netted more than three thousand for the Clearwater." He paused and stroked her long hair with the back of his hand. "What did he say to you, Mary?"

Mary put her arms around her husband's waist, rested her head on one of his broad shoulders, and shuddered slightly. "I know things like that happen to other people, but I never thought it would happen to me. God, Garth, when he pulled that gun and pointed it at you, I— If he'd killed you, it would have been because of me!"

"That's nonsense. What exactly did he say?"

She straightened up, shrugged. "He told me he'd been a fan of mine for a long time and he had some things to give to me that would prove it. He was starting to make a few obscene suggestions when you came along." She took Garth's hand and looked into his eyes. "His threatening you with that gun should mean that he'll be locked away for a time, right?"

"I hope so," Garth said, but in fact he was experiencing a distinct sense of foreboding.

Mary pointed at the manila envelope he had placed on the table. "I don't want to read any of that."

"It's filled with love letters, lousy poetry, and even some song lyrics—most of it very sexual, and all of it meant for you, sweetheart. This man's had you on his mind for a long time."

Mary shook her head and brushed a strand of hair away from her eyes with a hand that had again begun to tremble. "You know I get stuff like this in the mail all the time. If he was going to go to the trouble to write to me, why hang onto it for years?"

"Maybe because he was in a place where it wasn't safe to send fan letters to a pacifist folk singer. As soon as I get you home, I'm going over to the station to talk to Jake and Fred about our friend in the beret."

Michael Gannett, the soft-spoken owner of the Hudson Shore, suddenly appeared at his side. "There's a phone call for you, Garth."

"Who?"

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"He wouldn't identify himself. He says it's about what happened earlier, and that it's important."

Garth hurried back to the alcove between the dining room and the auxiliary bar where there were pay telephones. One of the receivers was off the hook. He picked it up. "Frederickson."

"Kill him before he kills you." The voice was flat and oddly muffled, as if the man was making an effort to disguise it. "He will leave you no choice. Don't let happen to you what happened to the man in Orlando. Strike first."

"Who are you?" Garth asked, but there was a click and the line went dead. He hung up the phone and, determined to mask his sudden sense of urgency from Mary, walked back to the table and calmly asked her to wait for him in the restaurant until he returned.

Out into the evening, he ran the two and a half blocks to the Cairn police station, where he found Jake Goldberg standing beside the doorway leading into a back room where there were two holding cells.

The policeman's face was flushed with anger, and he seemed startled to see Garth. "You must be able to read minds," he said as Garth approached him. "I was just getting ready to call you. Your guy got sprung."

Garth glanced at his watch. "How could he have made bail so soon? No lawyer—"

"It wasn't a lawyer who got him out. The Feds took him."

"When?"

"About thirty seconds ago. They walked out the back just as you were coming in the front."

Garth wheeled and ran out of the office. He went out the door of the station house, vaulted over the iron railing to his left, and landed in the center of the narrow asphalt driveway directly in the path of the car coming out of the parking lot in the rear.

The car's brakes screamed in protest as the driver slammed his foot on the brake pedal and the car came to a halt with the front bumper less than four inches from Garth's knees. Garth took a step backward, shielded his eyes from the glare of the headlights, and noted the car's license-plate number. Then he stepped forward again, leaned on the hood, and peered through the windshield at the three startled occupants of the car. Two men in suits and ties sat in the front. The driver was a young, solidly built man with blond hair closely cropped in a crewcut. The other, heavyset, with a swarthy

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complexion, looked to be about fifty. The man with the black beret sat in the rear seat, unattended and without handcuffs.

The heavyset man jumped out of the car. "What the hell's the matter with you! You want to get killed?"

"My name's Frederickson," Garth said. "What I want is to know who you are, the identity of the man in your back seat, and where you're taking him."

The heavy man reached into the inside pocket of his suit jacket and withdrew a thin leather wallet which he flipped open to reveal a photo I.D. card and metal shield. "I'm Agent Baker, F.B.I. This is Agent Walker with me. You're interfering with Federal officers in the performance of their duty and risking arrest and prosecution. Now do yourself a favor and get out of the way!"

Garth heard footsteps behind him. He turned his head as Jake Goldberg came up on his left, then leaned back casually against the brick wall of the precinct station and crossed his arms over his chest. The policeman's dark eyes were impassive, but there was the slightest hint of amusement on his face—he looked like a man who had stopped by to see a show. "As a police officer and your friend, Garth," he said, "I have to advise you that you should do what the man says. They're the real McCoy—I checked them out with the New York bureau before I released that joker into their custody. I had no choice, and you don't, either. I have everybody's names on the receipt I made them sign."

Garth shook his head. "Not good enough. Their passenger's name could be a phony, and I'll bet anything it is."

"Get out of the way!" Baker shouted, his face flushed and his eyes flashing. "This is your last warning!"

"That man harassed my wife and threatened me with a gun," Garth said, addressing himself now to the agent identified as Walker, who had also stepped out of the car. The man in the black beret was following the conversation intently, his head halfway out of the open back window. "He's broken the law as well as shown himself to be a threat to my wife and me—and you're chauffeuring him around like he's your honored guest. I intend to press charges against this man, and as a citizen I have a right to know exactly who he is and where you plan to take him."

"He's in Federal custody," Baker said. "And you're overreaching. Get out of the way."

Garth decided to fire the only real weapon he had in his arsenal, even if it turned out to carry only a blank. He might never have

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another chance to confront any of these men and he was determined not to let the man in the black beret vanish. "Maybe if his victim in Orlando had overreached, he'd still be alive."

Baker exchanged a startled glance with his younger partner.

"Make him go away!" the man in the black beret shouted out the car window. "What's the matter with you people! Just make him go away!"

"Are you going to make me just go away?" Garth asked. "The gun that man pulled on me was a weapon of choice for many members of the officer corps of what used to be the East German Staatsicherheit. I have no idea what he's doing in this country or why you think he deserves such royal treatment, but I guarantee that I'm going to try to find out if you spirit him away from here. The chances are he's a killer, just like the other Stasi who have disappeared from Germany, along with their leader. He's dangerous and I don't want him coming at my back on some dark night."

Walker shook his head and spoke to his partner. "Well, we're sure as hell going to have to take him in now."

Baker nodded curtly, then strode around the open car door, pulled his gun, and pointed it at Garth's head. "You're under arrest. Turn around, lean against the wall, and spread your legs."

Garth did as he was told. Baker patted him down and, removing the wallet from Garth's rear pocket, he handed it to Walker. "Check him out," he said. When Walker returned to the car and picked up the radio, Baker handcuffed Garth, turned him around, then leaned close to his face. "Where the hell do you get your information, mister?"

"The newspapers," Garth replied evenly.

"That's not good enough. How do you know what weapons were issued to the Stasi?"

Garth glanced at Jake Goldberg, who smiled thinly.

"Hey, Avery," Walker called from the car, an odd note to his voice, "you'd better get over here. The Chief wants to talk to you right now, and he wants you to take the cuffs off Frederickson."

Garth turned around and saw Avery Baker look at his partner as if the man, or their superior, had committed some unspeakable gaffe as he strode back to the open car window on his side, reached inside, and took the radio handset from his partner. He spoke into it, listened for a few moments, then quickly got into the car, shut the door, and closed the window. The younger agent was staring at

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Garth through the windshield, his eyes betraying both hostility and strong interest.

Goldberg moved closer to Garth and said, "My money says this guy is being told in no uncertain terms not to hassle Frederickson. I'm glad you got here when you did. Pulling this guy out of our jail may be legal, but it's outrageous."

"It wasn't you who called me, Jake?"

"Somebody called you?"

Garth didn't reply. He watched Baker replace the radio handset in its cradle, then re-emerge from the car. The agent's swarthy face was impassive as he freed Garth's wrists and dropped the steel handcuffs into the pocket of his overcoat. "You and your brother carry a heavy reputation, Frederickson," he said tersely. "I didn't realize you were *that* Frederickson and I'm sorry we had to meet under these circumstances. In any case, my superior says I should let you go, and I think it's because a lot of important people don't want to get either of the Fredericksons riled. You must know where a lot of skeletons are buried."

Garth smiled. "Actually, it's my brother they're afraid of."

"Yeah, well, whatever the reason, I'm also to give you assurances that somebody from our office will be around within twenty-four hours to speak to you and your wife about this matter in detail. In the meantime, it would be appreciated if you wouldn't discuss this matter with anyone. The Chief says you know him and that his word means something. You can call him on the car radio if you want."

Garth searched Baker's face. "I don't need to take anyone's word but yours," he said and stepped aside.

He watched as the car pulled out of the driveway and saw the German's face staring at him through the rear window. The pale-green eyes gleamed with hatred as his mouth moved, carefully articulating the words, *I will kill you.*

"I'd like to speak with you and your wife together," Avery Baker said in an almost apologetic tone when he appeared at their riverside home the next morning. The man seemed somehow different, less anxious to appear tough, and Garth suspected this was because he didn't have his young partner with him.

"Mary's in the other room," Garth said. "Come in."

Garth led the agent into the music room. Its walls of glass looked out over the Hudson. In the distance, sailboats and power boats

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glided over the rippled surface of the river. Baker nodded to Mary, who was sitting with one bare foot under her in a canvas director's chair, and said, "The man's real name is Gunther Francke." He looked back and forth between Garth and Mary. "As you guessed, Frederickson, he's a former member of East Germany's Staatsicherheit. And, as you noted, these people are not exactly beloved by their fellow citizens in that unhappy land. Thousands of them went into hiding after the collapse of the Communist regime there and many are now being actively recruited by various Intelligence agencies around the world." He paused and smiled thinly, without humor. "I'm told we are most fortunate to have acquired the services of Herr Francke."

Garth said, "It sounds like the province of the C.I.A."

"It most definitely is." The evenness of Baker's tone belied the expression of distaste on his face.

"Then what are you doing with him?"

"The C.I.A. doesn't have a good track record in dealing with would-be defectors—and that's how Francke is classified, even though his country no longer officially exists. We're acting at the specific bequest of the State Department. One of the demands Francke made when he approached the embassy official who recruited him was that he would not have to undergo C.I.A. interrogation. The State Department asked us to put him in our Witness Protection Program while he is gradually debriefed and the information evaluated. That's proving to be a lengthy process. The C.I.A.'s laughing at us. They think we're all fools, and they've washed their hands of him. In effect, we're acting as well paid babysitters. He's not a prisoner and we're under orders to protect him. Unfortunately, we haven't figured out a way to protect others from him."

"You mean to tell me," Garth asked incredulously, "that he killed somebody in Orlando and you simply *moved* him?"

"I'm not at liberty to discuss Mr. Francke's movements. I don't know where you got that information."

"Why is this one man considered so important?"

"East Germany was a notorious haven and financial backer for any number of individual terrorists and their parent groups. As a result, the Stasi possessed an enormous amount of information about these people and the groups' infrastructures—including the names of dummy companies in this country specifically set up to aid terrorist movements in the United States. East Germany may no

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longer exist, but the terrorists and their infrastructures certainly do."

Garth shook his head impatiently. "Am I about to hear the same rationale that was used for bringing ex-Nazis, including known war criminals, into this country after the Second World War?"

"The analogy wouldn't be inaccurate," Baker said in a flat tone.

"Again, what's so special about Francke? The man is obviously unstable and proven dangerous. Throw him back in and get yourself another fish. Like you said, there are thousands of them out there."

"Apparently not like this one. In the last days before the Communist regime crumbled, the Stasi destroyed or hid most of their files. The information we need now exists only in the heads of some of these men."

Garth grunted. "What evidence do you have that this guy knows anything?"

"The State Department says he was one of Markus Wolf's top aides. He had access to all the records, and they think there's a good chance he's telling the truth when he claims to have memorized information about terrorist networks and front groups in this country."

"Claims? I take it he's not being exactly forthcoming with all this valuable information he supposedly committed to memory."

Baker shrugged. "We've been ordered to adopt a strictly custodial posture. The State Department says he's just trying to negotiate the best terms for staying in this country, and we're supposed to show him how good things could be if he fully cooperates. Do you see the dilemma?"

Mary, who had been listening to the conversation with growing incredulity, said, "Move him to another part of the country, far away from us! Garth says you've moved him once already!"

Baker slowly shook his head. "I haven't confirmed that information. Even if it's true, it would be irrelevant. Francke's decided he likes it here. The way he sees it, Mr. Frederickson, it was you who accosted him, and he was only preparing to defend himself. He is, of course, quite right when he points out that there are many people who would love to get their hands on him, or see him dead."

"He has a sexual fixation on my wife."

"Your wife is a beautiful, world-famous artist, sir. Writing letters—even obscene letters—is something I'm sure a good number of other people have done. Apparently Francke became a fan while listening to bootleg albums and tapes he'd confiscated from East

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German youths, and at border crossings. He began writing letters to her, but hung onto them for the obvious reason that it wouldn't have boded well for him to be caught writing fan letters to an artist of Ms. Tree's political leanings. In any case, he has made it clear that if we were to try to force him to move from here, the State Department will lose his trust and good will."

The F.B.I. agent glanced back and forth at Mary and Garth. He seemed slightly embarrassed. "The State Department and the Bureau think you should move, or at least go away for a time, if his presence in the community bothers you. Without admitting in any way that this man might pose a threat to the two of you, or anybody else, we're prepared to pay all reasonable expenses for up to a period of one year, if Ms. Tree will stop giving concerts and the two of you go to another section of the country for an extended vacation, under the auspices of the Witness Protection Program."

"I think not, Mr. Baker," Mary said drily.

They talked late into the night, discussing the intolerable impact it would have on their lives to wait indefinitely, anxiously wondering if and when the German would strike, descending on one or both of them without warning, at a time and place of his choosing. Not willing to accept that situation, they agreed that their best option was to test the man's intentions and freedom of movement. They had to lure him to them at a time and place of their choosing.

It was Mary who came up with a plan. Although Garth was initially opposed to it, the logic of her proposal was unassailable and she finally won him over by pointing out that any risk couldn't be greater than the one that already existed, for Gunther Francke certainly knew where to find them already.

On the afternoon of the day when the first posters announcing Mary's benefit concert for the *Clearwater* appeared in the riverfront communities, Garth received a second warning from the anonymous caller with the flat, muffled voice.

"The concert is a mistake that could prove fatal. Make sure you see him before he sees you."

On the night of the open-air concert, Garth waited forty-five minutes in the shadows of a copse of trees on a hill in Cairn's riverside park, scanning the faces in the crowd that had gathered. When he had satisfied himself that Francke was not on the field in front of the stage where Mary was performing, he went searching in the

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darkness of the park's perimeter. There he found Francke, sitting atop a large outcropping of rock where he had a clear view of the brightly lighted concert stage a hundred and fifty yards below. Beside him, barely visible in the shadows cast by the moon through the trees, were binoculars and a high-powered rifle with a telescopic sight and homemade silencer. Garth put a hand on his shoulder, and when Francke started to turn he hit him hard on the point of the jaw. He lifted the unconscious man, flung him across his shoulder, and carried him down toward the river.

Gunther Francke heard the water close by when, half an hour later, he awoke to find himself in a chair across from his enemy, their left wrists strapped together with duct tape.

"Are you crazy?!" he screamed. "What are you doing?!"

"Getting to know you."

Gunther looked around at the walls of weathered wood, the windows looking out over the river. His gaze came to rest on a shelf built into the north wall where a Colt revolver rested between a tape recorder and a telephone. "Where are we?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

"A boathouse on my property," Garth replied. "You can try shouting if you'd like, but I doubt anyone's going to hear you. You know, half the Nazis the C.I.A. and State Department slipped into this country in nineteen forty-five weren't even college graduates, much less the rocket scientists they claimed to be. I'm just wondering if you're really all your hosts believe you to be. I think it's time someone pressed you a bit to establish your *bona fides.*"

"You're crazy!"

"Exactly. I'm probably even crazier than you are, or than you think I am. You may want to bear that in mind as the days pass. I'm certainly crazy enough to kill you out of hand and dump you in the river before I let you harm my wife.

"Now that we've established that, we can get on with our other business. You've harassed my wife and threatened to kill me. I sensed you were a killer before you ever opened your mouth. The only reason I haven't put you out of everybody's misery already is because I have a nagging suspicion that's exactly what certain people would like me to do, and I don't care to do somebody else's dirty business—or to give up my life and freedom if I don't have to. Consequently, before we leave here, we're going to reach an accommodation. You're going to tell me everything you supposedly

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know that your keepers are so anxious to know. I don't have much of a taste for torture or I'd just beat it out of you. So I'm going to share your misery—no food, water, or sleep for either of us until you give me what I want. Then we're going to call your keepers, you're going to gladly accept new placement as far away from Cairn as they can take you, and neither my wife nor I are ever going to see or hear from you again. That's the deal."

Garth paused and motioned toward the revolver on the shelf. "If that all seems too complicated for you, you always have the option of going for the gun. But in that case—"

The man loosed a string of curses in German and jumped out of his chair. He lurched to the side, trying to drag Garth after him as he stretched out his right hand for the gun. Garth braced himself, then swung his left arm in a counter-clockwise motion. Gunther shrieked as his left arm broke at the wrist and just above the elbow. With pain swimming in his pale-green eyes, he sank to his knees, then slumped on the floor as Garth cut the tape joining their wrists with a pocket knife.

"You should have let me finish," Garth said evenly. "I told you I was willing to suffer with you for as long as it took, but I was about to warn you that all bets were off if you went for the gun."

"I need a doctor!" Gunther rolled back and forth on the splintered wood floor, cradling his shattered arm.

"You were ready to kill me, and maybe my wife, too. I'll get you a doctor when you tell me what I want to know. Don't bother lying. You'll find out that my craziness includes a pretty good sense of when people are lying. Tell me the truth, and I'll know it."

"I don't know *anything!*" the German screamed in agony. "I'm not Gunther Francke! The papers are forged! Call a doctor! I can't stand the pain!"

Garth stood over the man for a few moments, studying him carefully. Finally he nodded. "I believe you," he said as he walked over to the shelf and turned on the tape recorder. "Now all you have to do is provide enough detail about who you really are and how you managed to assume another identity."

When the man had finished supplying information to his satisfaction, Garth braced his broken arm with a crude splint, then called the house. Mary answered in the middle of the first ring.

"The man's ex-Stasi, all right," Garth told her, "but he was just a minor functionary, a prison guard in charge of interrogation who

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beat up enough political prisoners to know he was going to be in big trouble in the post-Honneker regime. He killed the man whose papers he's holding, went to our embassy in West Germany, and offered his services. Once he got over here, he got carried away and made the mistake of overplaying his hand. Then he couldn't stop. Now maybe they'll send him back to Germany and get him out of our hair. I've got it all on tape. Call an ambulance, and then the F.B.I. office in—"

"Baker and Walker are *here,* Garth."

He found he wasn't surprised.

"They didn't know where you were, and I didn't tell them, but they're certain you have the German. Where do you want to meet them?"

"Tell them to come down here."

"There's another man with them, Garth."

"Who?"

"He didn't introduce himself. He's waiting outside the house."

"He'll be coming down whether we want him to or not," Garth said.

He headed up the path leading to the house as the three men approached. The unidentified man was tall and lean, with cold black eyes and grey stubble on his cheeks. He was wearing khaki chinos, sneakers, and a bulky green windbreaker with a Chicago Bears logo. As they met halfway, the man in the windbreaker brushed past Garth without looking at him or saying a word.

"Here's the tape." Garth handed the cassette to Avery Baker. "His real name is Wolfgang Ingwers, and you already know more about terrorist networks than he does."

"Your wife told us," Baker said, meeting Garth's gaze as he accepted the cassette and dropped it in his pocket. "We'll check it out. If what you say is true, he's out of here."

There was a soft, almost imperceptible chugging sound from the direction of the boathouse. Baker and Walker exchanged startled glances, and Garth realized that it hadn't occurred to the two F.B.I. agents that the unshaven man who had been sent to them was a C.I.A. assassin. Garth had known as soon as he'd seen the man that the German was indeed about to be out of there.

The younger agent started toward the boathouse. Baker started after him, but Garth grabbed his arm. "You tell the company man down there to clean up his own goddamn mess," he said in a low

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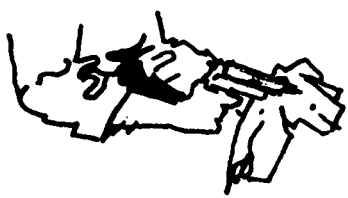
voice. "I mean that literally. I don't want any sign of him—not a drop of blood on the floor. You understand?"

"I'll make sure he gets the message. My guess is that a disposal service is waiting nearby. Take your wife out for a drink, Frederickson. When you get back, your lives will be the same as they were before."

"No, they won't," Garth replied tersely. He glanced toward the boathouse to make sure there was no one within earshot. "Thanks for the calls, Baker."

The agent responded with a curt smile and Garth continued on up the path toward Mary.



DETECTIVERSE

OVERRULED

by BOB LANHAM

"He's insane!" the defense counsel cried
Of his client's most foul homicide.
But the judge smelled a phony
When he heard testimony
And ruled he was fit to be tried.

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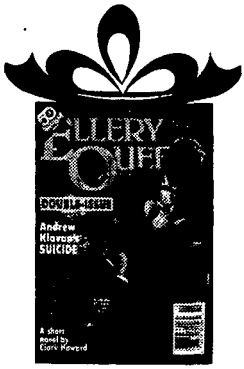
WRAP UP YOUR HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING



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an Inspector Dover reprint by

JOYCE PORTER

Before Joyce Porter's death earlier this year, she completed a Final Hon. Con story we will treat you to in our upcoming holiday issue. But before we make our final goodbyes, we'll bring her most famous sleuth back to take one last bow . . .

DOVER AS NEMESIS

by JOYCE PORTER

"Wadderyemean, there's no bloody body?"

The young policeman who'd been left holding the fort looked close to tears. It was his first encounter with Scotland Yard's most notorious detective and nothing in his training had prepared him for the shock. That appallingly scruffy overcoat, that greasy bowler hat, those mean little button-black eyes, that sullen pasty face! "The gentleman died in the ambulance on the way to hospital, sir. Didn't they tell you?"

Having gazed his fill at the fatal staircase, Detective Chief Inspector Dover shoved his way back through the narrow doorway into the main hall and sat down weightily on the nearest chair. He merged well into his surroundings, which were comparably decrepit, unlovely, and none too clean. "Nobody," he whined in a bid for cheap sympathy, "ever bloody well tells me anything."

The young policeman glanced curiously at the third member of their little group, who was standing as far away as he dared in an attempt to disassociate himself from the proceedings. Detective Sergeant MacGregor, Dover's long-suffering assistant and whipping-boy, was dying to point out that he had regaled his chief inspector with every known fact about the case in the police car which

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had brought them racing out to one of London's grittier suburbs, but—police discipline being what it is—he didn't. Besides, he blamed himself. Who knew better than he did that when Dover sat there with his eyes closed it wasn't because the fat old fool could concentrate better that way.

"Cat got your tongue?"

The young policeman pulled himself together and decided to keep it short and simple. "The deceased is a Mr. Humbert Mew, sir, aged about fifty-five. He was a faith healer, sir."

" 'Strewth!" said Chief Inspector Dover in tones of the utmost disgust.

"He was due to hold one of his faith-healing sessions here in the Quine Street Social & Recreation Rooms at two o'clock this afternoon. It's a regular booking, sir. Well, Mr. Mew arrived at about half past one, sir, with his wife and a Mr. Glossop, his business manager."

"Business manager!" scoffed Dover.

The young policeman struggled on. "While the other two were getting the hall ready for the meeting, sir, Mr. Mew retired as was his custom to the room at the top of the stairs for a period of quiet preparation. As you will see, sir, the stairs are shut off from the main hall by this door here."

Dover nodded—and a gentle shower of dandruff floated down onto the shoulders of his overcoat.

"It was Mr. Mew's habit, sir, to remain alone in that upstairs room until two o'clock. Meantime, the people who'd come to attend the meeting and consult him were gathering here."

Dover looked 'round with little enthusiasm. Several rows of uncomfortable chairs, on one of which he was sitting, had been set out facing a small raised platform at the far end. And that was it, apart from some grimy windows set up high near the ceiling and a badminton court laid out on the floor. "One born every minute," he commented sourly.

"Yes, sir."

"Mind you, laddie," added Dover with more than a touch of self-pity, "when you've got a stomach like mine, faith healing's about all there is left."

MacGregor knew what could happen if Dover's stomach was allowed to intrude into the conversation. He smiled at the young policeman in an effort to show the human face of Scotland Yard. "You collected names and addresses?"

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"I've got a list for you, Sarge."

"How many are there, by the way?"

"About thirty, Sarge."

"Christ!" moaned Dover, for whom work was a four-letter word. "We'll be at it till bloody Christmas!"

It was not the young policeman's place to speculate on the accuracy of this prediction, so, after a moment's understandable hesitation, he went on with his story. "At two o'clock, sir, Mr. Mew came out of his room and began to descend the stairs. That's when it happened. People out here in the hall said they heard a sort of shout followed by several bangs and thuds. Mr. Mew was quite a heavy gentleman, sir, and those stairs are pretty steep.

"Well, Mr. Glossop was sitting just here by the door and he got to the foot of the stairs first. He realized Mr. Mew was in a bad way and an ambulance was phoned for. P.C. Roberts and I were on patrol in the vicinity and we also responded to the call. Mr. Mew was removed in the ambulance, sir, accompanied by his wife, and P.C. Roberts began questioning the people in the hall in an endeavor to procure an accurate picture of the incident.

"I proceeded to examine the staircase, sir. I ascertained that, although uncarpeted and none too well lit, it couldn't be classified as dangerous. I was about to attribute Mr. Mew's fall to an unfortunate trip or him coming over faint or something when my eye was caught by an object on the wall at the top of the staircase. It was a small hook, sir. Painted black and screwed into the wall about a foot up from the second tread down, if you follow me, sir."

Dover was glowering balefully. So this was the interfering little bastard he had to thank for a ruined weekend.

"Perhaps I could show you, sir? It'd be easier than trying to explain."

The suggestion that Dover should get up off his backside fell very flat.

"Well, sir, I investigated further and found another similar hook, in the baluster, opposite the first one. Hanging down from this second hook, on the outside of the staircase, was a length of thin twine, also painted black. There's a coatrack on the side of the staircase, sir, and the length of twine was partly concealed behind the coats hanging there. I checked the length of the twine and noted that it had been snapped in two. I had no doubt that it had originally been stretched across the staircase between the two hooks and that Mr.

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Mew had broken it in his fall. With the release of tension, it flipped away to hang down the side of the staircase."

Dover's eyes weren't closed this time, but they were glazed.

The young policeman hurried to get it over. "At this moment, sir, news came through that Mr. Mew was in fact dead and I had no hesitation in concluding that we had a case of murder. P.C. Roberts concurred, sir."

"Good work, constable," said MacGregor, because somebody had to. "So you think somebody fixed up this booby trap after Mr. Mew retired to the room upstairs, so that when, at two o'clock, he emerged to conduct his healing session he'd trip over it, fall, and kill himself?"

"That's about it, Sarge. Except I think the screws could have been put in much earlier. It's unlikely anybody would spot them and it would save time. All the murderer would have to do then is thread the twine through and tie it tight. Presumably he was counting on being able to remove all the evidence in the confusion after Mr. Mew's fall. If he'd managed that, of course, we'd have just put it down as an accident."

At this point, and somewhat belatedly, a police photographer and a fingerprint expert arrived and the young policeman broke off to conduct them to the scene of the crime.

Dover crooked a finger at MacGregor. "Come on! This place gives me the bloody creeps."

"But hadn't we better wait to see if they find anything, sir? There may be prints or—"

"The day I rely on bloody scientific experts to solve my cases for me'll be the day I hang my bloody boots up!" declared Dover, who favored what one might call, for want of a better word, the psychological approach.

"Where were you thinking of going, sir?" MacGregor was quite prepared to learn that the old fool fancied a cinema or a strip club or even a stroll along the Embankment in the pouring rain.

"We'll go and see the wife," said Dover. "The odds are she croaked him and we might get a confession if we jump on her quick."

With a sinking heart, MacGregor realized that they were probably in for another dose of the Dover Method. This was a simple technique which consisted of thumping the spouse of the deceased around until he or she pleaded guilty to murder. It was surprising how often it worked . . .

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Mrs. Mew, however, got Dover's measure very quickly. Good-looking and in her late thirties, she spotted that he was unlikely to be seduced from the path of duty by womanly wiles, so she gave him a chair by the fire, a stiff drink, and a cigarette—and got herself crossed off the list of suspects before you could say Adelaide Bartlett. She forestalled any doubts as to the depths of her grief with the same skill.

"I was never one to wear my heart on my sleeve, even as a girl," she confided. "Not that Humbert and me was exactly setting the world on fire. It wasn't so bad before he went on this faith-healing kick, mind you. He'd got a good job and things were ticking over quite nicely. Then, a couple of years ago, he discovers he's got this strange power and he chucks everything else clean out of the window. Not that you can't make a bomb out of faith healing," she admitted ruefully, "but Humbert wasn't interested. Said he couldn't prostrate his gifts for sordid gain."

"Was it a con?" asked Dover.

"You tell me, dearie. All I can say is sometimes he really did do extraordinary things. Not always, mind you—there was some he couldn't do anything for. But—well—take my knee."

Dover and MacGregor stared solemnly as Mrs. Mew stretched out one black-stockinged leg.

"You wouldn't believe the trouble I've had with it for donkey's years, and the pain. Humbert cured it in a matter of seconds. Honest! And he was wonderful with migraines. Or take old Mrs. Pretty—the doctor had given her a fortnight at the most when she called Humbert in, and look at her now! She won't ever run a four-minute mile, but she gets around. Comes to our Saturday meetings at Quine Street as regular as clockwork. She was there this afternoon—and it's over a year since they reckoned the next stop was the crematorium."

"Ah, yes," said MacGregor quickly, "this afternoon!" He knew that once Dover got comfortable, he tended to lose what sense of urgency he ever had. "Perhaps you could tell us about that. Now, I understand that your husband always retired to that room at the top of the stairs before the meeting began."

"He sort of had to psyche himself up," agreed Mrs. Mew, solicitously refilling Dover's glass. "Fanatic about that, he was. Half an hour's complete peace and quiet. Me or Glossy used to stay by the door to see nobody got through to disturb him."

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"Glossy?" grunted Dover, just to show he had the interview well under control.

"Glossy Glossop, our business manager. You've got to have somebody to see to all the arrangements. Glossy's like me—he wanted Humbert to break into the big time."

"Who was on guard today?" asked MacGregor.

"Glossy. He wouldn't let anybody through."

"Nobody at all?"

Mrs. Mew gave Dover another cigarette. "Only the ushers, dear. We let them hang their coats up at the foot of the staircase. It's one of their little perks. There's a sort of cloakroom by the entrance, but it gets a bit of a scrum there and we have had the odd thing pinched. Oh—" Mrs. Mew's face crumpled "—I've just thought! What's going to happen about my bad knee now?"

MacGregor, while not unsympathetic, had more serious problems on his mind. "What are the names of these ushers?"

"There's only two, dear." Mrs. Mew tucked her handkerchief away down her cleavage. "Cyril Watterson and Douglas Pretty."

"Does Mr. Glossop hang his coat at the bottom of the stairs?"

"Of course he does, dear."

"And how about you, madam?"

Mrs. Mew was nobody's fool. She grinned. "Oh, I kept mine on, dear. That hall can strike very chill. You can ask anybody. I was wearing my mutation Chinese mink, so they're sure to have noticed."

There's no doubt the questioning would have proceeded even more penetratingly if there hadn't been an interruption. The door burst open and a sporting-looking gentleman came breezily into the room.

He was only momentarily disconcerted at finding the place full of policemen. "Ah," he said, deftly slipping his bunch of keys back into his pocket, "you left the front door ajar, Iris." He indicated the bottle of champagne and the large heart-shaped box of chocolates with which he was burdened. "Just thought I'd pop around and see if I could cheer things up a bit. I'm Glossy Glossop, by the way."

MacGregor turned a little ostentatiously to a clean page in his notebook while Mr. Glossop made himself at home, pouring out a drink and sitting on the sofa next to Mrs. Mew. "You were the late Mr. Mew's business manager, I understand."

"Business manager, publicity agent, counselor—what's in a nomenclature, squire?" Mr. Glossop dropped his voice to a sincere bari-

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tone. "I was Humbert's *friend*." He got his cigar case out and offered Dover one.

"How long had you been with him?"

"Eighteen months. Long enough to fully appreciate the man's amazing gifts but not long enough, unfortunately, to persuade him to share them with the waiting world. Still, we were working on him, weren't we, Iris, my love?"

Dover took his free cigar out of his mouth and examined it with considerable alarm. The back of his throat felt as though somebody'd been at work with a blowtorch. He put the next question himself, just to make sure his vocal chords hadn't been damaged beyond recall. "What did you do before you became a con man?"

It was difficult to offend Mr. Glossop. He explained good-naturedly that he'd been a commercial traveler of sorts.

He was much more precise when it came to describing how Mr. Mew had fallen to his death that afternoon. When Mr. Mew had withdrawn for his usual bout of spiritual preparation, Mr. Glossop had, as per usual, taken up his station out in the main hall. It was a chore to have to sit there guarding the door for the best part of half an hour, but bitter experience had shown how disastrous it was to allow the faith healer to be disturbed. "Remember what a bloody shambles we had at Brighton, Iris? When that stupid Welsh female broke in on him? God, the state he worked himself into he couldn't have cured a side of bacon. No, I learned my lesson at Brighton, squire. Since then, nobody—but *nobody*—has got past me."

MacGregor looked up. "But you did let some people go through the door from the hall, didn't you?"

"Only Pretty and Watterson. I don't count them. They know what the score is."

"Did they arrive together?"

"No, Pretty came first. Young Watterson didn't show up till ten to two. I remember wondering if the spotty little git was going to let us down again."

"How long did they take, hanging up their coats?"

"Not long enough to fix that trip wire up, if that's what you're after, squire. A few seconds."

"But the door from the hall was closed, wasn't it? You couldn't actually see them?"

Glossy Glossop handed his empty glass to Mrs. Mew and she got up to replenish it for him. Dover gulped the dregs of his down at top speed so as to save his hostess's legs.

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"Out of sight is not out of mind, squire. We had a number of newcomers at this afternoon's session and I wanted our two acolytes out there mingling. That's what they're appointed for—to mingle."

MacGregor watched Mr. Glossop carefully. "And how long were you hanging your coat up, sir?"

"Look, squire—" Glossy Glossop leaned forward to make sure MacGregor got the message "—I had a damned good look at those screws your young bobby found and do you want my considered opinion? Five minutes! At least. That's if you'd got everything ready to hand like tools and things. Now, in those meetings in the Quine Street Rooms I'm a public figure, squire. If I'm not visible during the preliminaries, folk are going to notice, believe me. Five minutes? If I'm not back in that hall in ten seconds flat, I've got a queue forming to speak to me."

"Collusion," said Dover.

He and MacGregor were back in the police car again, driving through wet and deserted streets.

"Do you think so, sir?"

" 'Strewth, even you must have spotted what was going on there." MacGregor clenched his fists in the darkness of the back seat. Dover's habit of regarding his unmarried sergeant as a sexual ignoramus had ceased to be even mildly funny several years ago. "Extramarital liaisons are hardly grounds for murder these days, sir," he said coldly. "Not when divorce is so easy. Besides, I doubt if either Glossop or Mrs. Mew would be so foolish as to kill the goose that lays the golden egg."

"What bloody golden egg?" demanded Dover. "That's what they kept sniveling about—that What'shisname wouldn't turn himself into a money-spinner."

"I fancy they were both better off financially with him, sir, than they're likely to be without him."

Dover switched tactics and plumped for blinding MacGregor with higher mathematics. "So what about the time element, eh?" he inquired. "If it takes five bloody minutes for one person to fix those screws and things, two people could do it in half the time. It's like I said—collusion."

"Well, actually, sir," said MacGregor, "I've been thinking about the length of time it must have taken."

But he had left it too late. They had arrived at their destination and Dover was already legging it up the garden path with all the

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urgency of a man with a notoriously weak bladder.

What Mr. Pretty thought when he answered the impassioned hammering on his front door to find a large fat man—red of face and askew of bowler—charging over the threshold and demanding to be told where the karzi was is not known. Suffice it to say that he kept his head and, with Dover closeted in the downstairs cloakroom, it fell to MacGregor to make the necessary introductions, explanations, and apologies.

" 'Strewth," puffed Dover when he joined MacGregor and Mr. Pretty in the front room, "that was a near thing! I reckon that booze must have been off or something. If they weren't trying to poison me." He smacked his lips. "Left a hell of a funny taste in my mouth."

Mr. Pretty rose to the bait. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

Dover's sense of outrage was almost tangible. "Is that all you've got?"

"There's cocoa," said Mr. Pretty. "And I wonder if I could ask you to keep your voice down. Mother's in the next room. Mr. Mew's death has been a terrible shock to her and I've had to give her a sedative." He ran a trembling hand over his bald head. "I shudder to think what's going to happen now. Humbert Mew was all that's been keeping Mother alive. She was literally at death's door before we met him. And now, with him gone—" He dabbed feebly at his lips with his handkerchief. "Mother is all I have, gentlemen. There's just the two of us. We've always been together and looked after each other." He swallowed hard. "I just don't know what I'll do if anything happens to her."

MacGregor began the routine questioning and it soon emerged that not only was Mr. Pretty unmarried but he didn't have a job, either. Well, Mother had needed constant attention for many years and luckily there was enough money to keep them both in modest comfort.

Dover stared enviously at Douglas Pretty. Some people have all the bloody luck! Not, mind you, that he would have wiled away his leisure hours making crummy model aeroplanes if he'd been blessed with a private income. Bloody kids' stuff! He sneered at the table which was littered with all the paraphernalia of Mr. Pretty's hobby—bits of cardboard and plastic, little tins of paint and glue.

Meantime, Mr. Pretty was wending his uninspired way through that afternoon's events at the Quine Street Rooms. He had little new to offer, even when Dover informed him, in a laudable attempt

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to liven things up, that he was Number One murder suspect.

Mr. Pretty, it transpired, had arrived at the hall well before the meeting was due to start. "I have to get Mother settled, you see, and she doesn't like to be rushed. And then I have this usher's job to do, too."

"Ah, yes! You and Mr. Watterson." MacGregor liked to demonstrate that, unlike some, he kept all the facts at his fingertips.

"He was late," grumbled Mr. Pretty half-heartedly. "Last week he didn't turn up at all. It makes it very difficult for me, you know. They're nearly all on crutches or in wheelchairs or old or something."

Mr. Pretty had not, of course, noticed if there'd been a piece of string stretched across the top of the stairs. He'd never thought to look. He'd just hung his coat up and gone straight back into the hall to get on with his duties.

Dover bestirred himself to ask a question. "Was Who'syourfather already in that room upstairs when you hung your coat up?"

"Oh, yes. Mr. Mew was always the first to arrive. He had to be, didn't he? Because of the key."

"What bloody key, for God's sake?"

Mr. Pretty couldn't understand what his two visitors were getting so excited about. It was only the key to the Quine Street Rooms. "The caretaker lives a couple of doors away and he's a proper little Hitler. He won't hand the key over to anybody except the person who made the booking. He won't even let Mr. Glossop have it just because it's Mr. Mew's name on his list." Mr. Pretty managed a sketchy smile. "Whatever else you can say about the Quine Street Rooms, their security is good."

Detectives like concrete things like keys, so MacGregor made a careful note of this one before pressing on with his interrogation.

No, Mr. Pretty couldn't imagine who would want to kill Mr. Mew—a man universally loved and respected and who had, after all, devoted his life to the service of others.

A disgruntled patient?

Mr. Pretty shook his head. "He never promised to cure anybody. He just said he'd do his best. And he was so obviously sincere that I can't see anybody bearing a grudge against him."

Could money be a motive?

Mr. Pretty looked shocked. "Mr. Mew wasn't making any money out of this! I know there was a small charge to attend the healing sessions, but that was only to cover the cost of the hall. People did

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make donations, of course—Mother did—but they were only small sums that people could afford."

MacGregor sighed. He could see that Dover was getting restless. No doubt hunger was gnawing at the fat slob's vitals yet again. Or thirst. "One last question, Mr. Pretty. Where were you when Mr. Mew fell?"

"Oh, out in the hall. I was talking to that lady with the rheumatism in her knees. I rushed over as soon as I heard the sound of Mr. Mew falling. I found Mr. Glossop already on the scene. He was just standing there, looking. Well, I could see that Mr. Mew was still alive and I was just about to kneel down and see how bad he was when Mr. Glossop sort of pushed me out of the way. Quite roughly, actually. He told me to go and phone for an ambulance. Well, that seemed awfully silly to me because I'm really quite experienced when it comes to handling sick people, whereas Mr. Glossop isn't. I suggested it would be far better if he did the telephoning while I tried to do what I could for Mr. Mew."

Douglas Pretty's eyes glinted almost spitefully behind his thick glasses. "Mr. Glossop seemed to lose his head completely. He shouted at me to do as I was told and stop arguing, and to shut the door leading out to the hall behind me because by now people were crowding 'round and staring in."

"Stingy bastard!" said Dover as they waited for Mr. Watterson's landlady to tear herself away from the television set and answer the door. "Him and his bloody cocoa!"

MacGregor rang the bell again. "I don't suppose there's anything much stronger in that household, sir."

"Which proves how bloody little you know about it, laddie!" retorted Dover, giving the door a kick. "If there's one thing folk keep handy for sick old ladies, it's brandy. 'Strewth, I could just do with a drop of Three Star to keep the chill out."

To Dover's fury, Cyril Watterson's hospitality didn't even extend to cocoa. His landlady provided two cooked meals a day (three at weekends) and it would have been a foolhardy lodger who asked for anything more. She didn't hold with smoking, either.

"Your problem, laddie!" said Dover, taking a deep drag on the cigarette he'd cadged from MacGregor.

Cyril Watterson, a gangly, sex-mad youth, scrambled around frantically for something that would do as an ashtray. The best he could

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do was a tin of zinc ointment and it took him several attempts to get the lid off.

"Nervous, are you, laddie?" asked Dover with a leer. "Got a bit of a guilty conscience, eh?"

Cyril Watterson shoved his hands deep out of sight in his pockets. "I hardly knew Mr. Mew!" he protested, backing into a small table and almost knocking it over. "I only started going to him four or five weeks ago, and for all the bloody good it's done me I might as well not have bothered. Bloody acne!" he moaned. "Girls think it's catching, you know." He remembered to whom he was speaking. "Not that I blamed him," he declared hurriedly. "I'm sure he did his best. And he's been no worse than the bloody doctors, has he?"

"You were acting as an usher this afternoon?" asked MacGregor.

"They're a bit short on people who've got their health and strength." Cyril Watterson was giving most of his attention to Dover. Dear God, the lousy old beggar wasn't really flicking his ash all over the floor, was he? "Not that I minded helping out. Not when I thought Mr. Mew was going to cure my spots. But lately, well—It's not as though you ever meet any birds there, is it? I skipped it last week," he added proudly. "I went to that Rock Festival in Dorset. Smashing! No shortage of crumpet there, eh?"

As a would-be, latter-day Don Juan, young Mr. Watterson was singularly unconvincing with his prominent Adam's apple and his pimples bouncing back the light from the naked overhead bulb.

MacGregor averted his eyes from the unappetizing sight. "Have you any thoughts about who might have killed Mr. Mew?"

"Glossy Glossop," said Cyril Watterson, flattered to have his views canvassed by experts from Scotland Yard. "I suspected him the minute it happened. I never bought that accident theory, you know."

If there was one thing Dover could do without it was this young punk's half baked ideas. "You could have fixed that bit of string across as easy as him, laddie."

"Ah, but I haven't got a motive, have I?"

"Has Glossop?"

"Hasn't he just!" In his eagerness to assist the police in their inquiries, Cyril Watterson sent a pile of girlie magazines slithering to the floor. He ignored them, and so did Dover. It was many a long day since the real thing had sent the blood coursing through the chief inspector's veins, never mind a few crummy photographs. "Money!" said Mr. Watterson. "Mind you, he's been screwing the fair Iris good and proper, but I don't reckon that as a reason for

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bumping Mr. Mew off. I mean, why buy a garage when you can hire a car?"

Dover eyed Cyril Watterson with intense dislike. "What bloody car?"

Cyril Watterson decided, very sensibly, to come straight to the point. There had been instances when various clever devils had attempted to take Dover with them on their flights of fancy and had ended up in the dock facing very serious charges. "I work in an accountant's office," he explained, "and I get a bit of commission if I introduce new business. So I put it to Mr. Mew that it might be a good idea to have his books done properly, by experts."

"And?"

"He was very taken with the idea, wasn't he? Said Glossy Glossop was forever going on about them being short of money and Mr. Mew couldn't understand it because he was doing such good work and the people he helped always seemed so grateful and generous. He said I'd given him a whole new slant on things. It wasn't that God or whoever wasn't providing enough of the ready, it was just that old Glossy couldn't cope with the bookkeeping."

MacGregor, at any rate, was interested. "When was this?"

"Two or three weeks ago. Well, that's it, isn't it? Mr. Mew tells Glossy he's going to have the books audited by my firm and Glossy sees the game's up. I reckon he's been fiddling things for awhile. That's why Mr. Mew wasn't killed last week."

"What do you mean?"

Cyril Watterson sighed. If this was Scotland Yard! "Because I wasn't there, was I? Glossy maybe hoped I'd gone for good and all this business about proper accounts would die the death. But, this afternoon, there I was again! So Glossy has to knock Mr. Mew off quicker than that before he could contact me and give me the go-ahead. Get it?"

There is no doubt that MacGregor would have pursued the matter further if it hadn't been for the ominous rumbles coming from Dover's stomach. Dover feeling peckish could be pure murder, so MacGregor lost no time in rushing him off to the nearest pub which sold bar snacks.

A pork pie, two cheese-and-pickle sandwiches, a piece of apple tart, and three pints of best bitter later found Dover in a more amenable mood. Indeed, he would have been well nigh comatose if the pangs of hunger hadn't been replaced by those of indigestion.

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He belched loudly before summing up his investigation thus far. "You can't win 'em all."

MacGregor was taken aback. Dover usually gave a murder case at least forty-eight hours before writing it off as insoluble. "But, sir—"

"Waste of the taxpayers' money," said Dover, as if he cared. He leaned back and undid the top button of his trousers. "It'll be one of that lot we've seen," he added with a grunt, "but we'll probably never know which one."

"But don't you think we ought to follow up this business of Glossop and the money, sir?"

Dover's determination to throw in the towel overcame his natural instinct to speak ill of people. "Glossop doesn't look like a murderer to me, laddie."

Desperate times call for desperate measures. MacGregor got his wallet out. "Can I get you another drink, sir?"

"I'll have a large rum and peppermint. This flatulence is giving me hell."

Having thus purchased five minutes of Dover's butterfly attention, MacGregor couldn't afford to waste it. "I think we've been going slightly off course, sir," he began cautiously, Dover not taking kindly to criticism. "We've been assuming the murderer set the booby trap *after* Mr. Mew retired to that upstairs room."

"Have we?"

"The screws could have been put in at any time, sir. Then today the twine could have been fixed across in a matter of seconds."

"That just makes everything even more bloody complicated."

"Not quite, sir. We'll need to check, of course, but it doesn't look easy to gain unauthorized access to that hall because of the caretaker. The murderer would therefore probably have put the screws in when he was there in the normal course of events—say a week ago, at the last faith-healing session."

Dover, who seemed to be having some difficulty in focusing his eyes, refrained from comment.

"And our murderer would need to be pretty good with his hands, sir. Getting those screws in would be quite tricky."

"That eliminates pimple-face, then," said Dover as the mists cleared for a moment. "Fingers like a bunch of bloody bananas!"

MacGregor began to feel quite hopeful. "We may be able to eliminate Mr. Watterson on another count, sir," he said encouragingly. "He wasn't there last week."

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"It's all bloody theory," grumbled Dover. He removed his bowler hat and wiped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief most people would have thought twice about using on their boots. "And it still leaves three of 'em—What'shisname, Who'syourfather, and the woman."

"Only Glossop and Pretty, actually, sir. Mrs. Mew kept her coat on, you remember, and didn't go near the staircase. She wouldn't have had the opportunity of making even the final adjustments to the booby trap."

"So she says," mumbled Dover, feeling vaguely uneasy as the rum started fighting it out with the other contents of his stomach.

"She's not likely to have lied about something so easy to check, sir. Which leaves Glossop and Pretty."

Some people would have tossed a coin. Dover simply recalled that heart-shaped box of chocolates that had never been handed 'round. "It's Glossop." He amplified his theory: "Cooking the books and adultery."

"I rather fancy Mr. Pretty, sir."

"You would?" sniggered Dover. He loved a good joke at the expense of his somewhat fastidious sergeant. "Just your type! Couldn't say boo to a bloody goose. Besides, what's his motive? According to him, Whatdoyoucallhim was all that was keeping his mother alive."

Family affection was not one of Dover's weaknesses, so even he got the point. "'Strewth, that's clever! Murder your rich old mother and the finger of suspicion's pointing straight at you. But knock off the one person who's keeping the old bird alive—"

"With his mother dead, sir, Pretty gets his freedom and the money while he's still young enough to enjoy it."

Dover thought hard. If it was MacGregor's theory, there must be something wrong with it. "It won't hold water, laddie."

MacGregor frowned. "Sir?"

"When the Cat man—"

"The Cat man, sir?"

Dover's entire body wobbled with mirth. "Mew—cat!" he guffawed. "Get it, laddie?"

One day, MacGregor promised himself grimly, he was going to cast prudence to the winds and stick a straight right on Dover's chins. "Very amusing, sir."

"You know your trouble, laddie," snarled Dover. "No bloody sense of humor. Well, like I was saying, when he fell downstairs they all came running—right? And there was a bit of an argey-bargey about

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who should phone for the ambulance and who should stay alone with the body—right? Well, you nit, it was *Glossop* who insisted on staying and on having the bloody door shut! He wouldn't have done that if he hadn't been the murderer."

"On the contrary, sir, that's the clincher! Don't you see? If Glossop was the murderer and he'd been left alone even for a couple of minutes back there by the staircase, he'd have removed those screws and the twine—the only evidence we have that it was murder at all. The fact that no attempt was made to get rid of such incriminating things proves that the real killer was never given the opportunity."

There was a long pause while Dover chewed this over. "Pity," he said at last.

"Sir?"

"You should have mentioned it earlier, laddie." Dover began gathering his overcoat 'round him and generally preparing to get to his feet. "We might have thumped What'shisname 'round a bit and got a confession." He folded up a podgy fist and regarded it affectionately. "I'd have quite enjoyed that."

"We could still confront him with the evidence, sir."

Dover shook his head. "It's all theory, laddie. Even the grounds for calling it murder are pretty shaky."

MacGregor didn't approve of beating up suspects, but, damn it all, they couldn't just fold their tents and steal away. "If we persuaded Pretty to confess, sir—"

"Easy as pie," agreed Dover. "One bloody nose and he'd spill the lot. Trouble is, it'd never stand up in court. He'd get himself one of these crooked lawyers, shout police brutality, and then where'd we be? No—" Dover made a supreme effort and achieved the vertical "—I reckon we're just going to have to forget about this one. Chalk it up to experience." He looked around. "You spotted the privy in your travels?"

"It's out at the back, sir. But, sir—" MacGregor so far forgot the most elementary rules of hygiene as to catch hold of Dover's sleeve with his bare hands "—we can't just let Pretty get away with murder."

"He won't get away with it," said Dover reassuringly. "What's the first thing the silly bugger'll do now that he's not tied to his old mother and he's got a nice bit of cash? He'll get bloody married, won't he? That's punishment enough for any man. Now, you've just got time to get another round in, laddie, before they put the towel over the pumps. I'll be back in a minute."

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ISAAC ASIMOV

"Am I to be grilled?"

"Only a manner of speaking, sir. We are interested in your literary problem. Would you care to tell us about it in whatever way you please? We will ask questions when that seems advisable, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I won't mind," said Atwood cheerfully. His eyes darted from one to the other. "I warn you that it isn't much of a mystery—except that I don't know what to make of it."

"Well, we might not know either," said Gonzalo, touching his brandy to his lips . . .

THE CURIOUS OMISSION

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Roger Halsted was clearly suffused with a controlled glee when he arrived at the monthly banquet of the Black Widowers. He unwound his scarf (it was a cold evening with considerably more than a hint of snow in the air—since half an inch of it already lay on the ground) and said, "Have I got a guest for you!"

Emmanuel Rubin looked at him over his Scotch and soda and said peevishly, "Where were you? Even Tom Trumbull beat you to the drinks—we thought you were welching on the host's responsibility."

Halsted looked hurt and his high forehead grew pink. He said, "I *called* the restaurant. Henry—"

Henry had adjusted the bread baskets and seen to it that the bran muffins affected by Geoffrey Avalon were in plain view. He said, "Yes, Mr. Halsted. The company was informed that you would be a

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little late. I believe Mr. Rubin is merely amusing himself at your expense."

Trumbull said, "What guest, Roger?"

"That's why I'm late. I had to pick him up in White Plains and it's snowing harder up there. I had to call the restaurant from a gas station."

"So where is he?" asked Mario Gonzalo, more than usually nattily dressed in a maroon blazer, matching striped shirt, and patterned tie.

"Downstairs. Men's room. His name is Jeremy Atwood; he's about sixty-five; and he has a problem."

Avalon from his considerably better than six feet of height drew his thick and greying eyebrows together. "I've been thinking, gentlemen, of this very matter. The original purpose of the Black Widowers consisted of nothing more than dining and conversation. We have now reached the point where we never fail to have a problem to agitate us and disturb our digestion. What happens when we can't find one? Do we disband?"

Gonzalo said, "Then we're back to conversation without a purpose. There's always Manny."

Rubin said, his sparse beard lifting noticeably, "Nothing I say is without a purpose, Mario. Failing all else, there's the vague hope my words may serve to educate you. For one thing, I can show you why your latest painting is completely wrong."

"You said you liked it," said Mario, frowning and stepping into the trap.

"Only out of relief when you said it was your last painting and only until I found out you meant it was your latest."

But Halsted's guest was coming up the stairs now. He moved rather slowly and he seemed tired. Halsted helped him off with his overcoat, and when the guest removed his hat he showed himself to be quite bald. Only a fringe of white hair remained.

Halsted said, "Gentlemen, this is my guest, Jeremy Atwood. I met him through the fact that one of his nephews is a fellow teacher. Mr. Atwood, let me present the company."

By the time the introductions were completed and a glass of dry sherry had been pressed into Atwood's hand, Henry had the first course on the table. Rubin stared at it suspiciously.

"No liver?" he asked.

"No liver, Mr. Rubin," said Henry. "Kidney slices are the base."

"Oh, Lord," said Rubin, "what's the soup?"

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"Cream of leek, Mr. Rubin."

"Coming and going. They get you coming and going," Rubin grumbled, and tackled the kidney with a gingerly probing fork.

Drake, with a glimmer in his small eyes which meant he thought he was on the track of a fellow chemist, said, "What does your nephew teach, Mr. Atwood?"

Atwood said, in a surprisingly musical tenor, "English literature, I believe. I am not very well acquainted with him."

"I don't blame you," said Rubin at once. "Teachers of English literature have probably turned out more illiterates than have any other force of illegitimate culture in the world."

"You see, Mr. Atwood," said Gonzalo, striving for his own back, "Manny Rubin is a writer whose works have never been discussed by any teacher who was sober at the time."

Trumbull spoke at once to cut off Rubin's retort. "What's your own line of work, Mr. Atwood?"

"I'm retired now, but once upon a time I was a civil engineer," said Atwood.

Avalon said, "You do not have to answer any questions now, Mr. Atwood. That will come with the dessert."

It turned out to be unnecessary advice, since Rubin had the bit in his teeth now and was off and running. With the soup, of which he had little, he developed the thesis that teachers of English generally and of English literature in particular had as their peculiar object the placing of the English language in chains and the making of literature a fossil in murky amber.

Over the main course—roast stuffed duck—Rubin proceeded to probe the motives of the English-teaching criminals and found it to consist of an embittered and hate-filled envy of those who could, past and present, use the English language as a tool.

"Like Emmanuel Rubin, of course," said Gonzalo in a stage whisper.

"Like me," said Rubin, unabashed. "I know more grammar than any so-called English teacher and have read more literature more closely than they can possibly have done, any of them. The thing is, I don't let the grammar bind me or the literature force me."

"Anyone who writes ungrammatical twaddle can say the same," said Avalon.

"That means something, Jeff," said Rubin hotly, "only if you're prepared to say that I write ungrammatical twaddle."

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Having disposed of his wild rice and somewhat neglecting the stuffing, Rubin began an eloquent dissertation on the damage done to young minds by those academic delinquents and took on the other five members as each raised objections until the *poire au vin* was served and the coffee was poured.

"Can I have a glass of milk instead?" said Atwood apologetically.

Henry's assent was lost in Rubin's triumphant "There you are. Any English teacher would have said, 'May I have a glass of milk?' but Atwood knows he may. The question is, does the restaurant *have* milk to serve? Therefore, '*can*' he, not 'may' he."

Atwood said, "Actually, my grammar has always been poor and maybe I should have said—"

Halsted rapped his spoon against the water glass and said, "Enough grammar, Manny. It's time for our guest."

"And that's why," said Rubin in a parting shot, "I don't collect reviews, because any English-lit type who would waste his time writing reviews—"

"He collects only favorable ones," said Gonzalo. "I know. He showed me his empty scrapbook."

Halsted's spoon kept up a series of chimes and finally he said, "My friend Stuart—Mr. Atwood's nephew—happened to mention a couple of weeks ago that Mr. Atwood had a literary problem. Naturally, I was interested—for reasons we all understand—and inquired further. It turned out Stu didn't know much about it. I got in touch with Mr. Atwood and he told me enough to make me think he would make an excellent guest for this meeting. Since I am hosting and he kindly consented to come—"

Avalon harumphed stentoriously. "I trust Mr. Atwood understands that he may be cross-examined rather—"

"I explained it all thoroughly, Jeff," said Halsted. "I also explained to him that everything that goes on here is confidential. As it happens, Mr. Atwood is rather interested in a solution to his problem, and is anxious to have us help."

Trumbull's dark face lined into savage creases. "God damn it, Roger, you haven't guaranteed a solution, have you?"

"No, but we've got a fair record," said Halsted complacently.

"All right, then, let's begin. Henry! Is the brandy on the way? Who does the grilling, Roger?"

"Why, you, Tom."

The brandy was being poured neatly into the small glasses. Atwood raised his hand in a timid negative and Henry passed him. He

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turned his bright-blue eyes toward Trumbull. "Am I to be grilled?"

"Only a manner of speaking, sir. We are interested in your literary problem. Would you care to tell us about it in whatever way you please? We will ask questions when that seems advisable, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I won't mind," said Atwood cheerfully. His eyes darted from one to the other. "I warn you that it isn't much of a mystery—except that I don't know what to make of it."

"Well, we might not know, either," said Gonzalo, touching his brandy to his lips.

Drake, who was nursing the remains of a cold and who had to cut down on his smoking in consequence, stubbed out a half finished cigarette morosely and said, "We'll never know if we don't hear what it is." He blew his nose into a bright-red handkerchief and stuffed it into his jacket pocket.

"Won't you go on, Mr. Atwood?" said Trumbull. "And let's have some silence from the rest of you."

Atwood folded his hands on the edge of the table almost as though he were back in grade school and a formal intonation colored his words. He was reciting.

"This all involves my friend, Lyon Sanders, who was, like myself, a retired civil engineer. We had never actually worked together, but we had been neighbors for a quarter century and were very close. I'm a bachelor, he was a childless widower, and we both led lives that might, superficially, have seemed lonely. Neither of us was, however, for we had each carved out a comfortable niche.

"I myself have written a text on civil engineering which has had some success, and for some years I have been preparing a rather elaborate, if informal, tale of my experiences in the field. I doubt that it will ever be published, but of course if it is—

"But that's beside the point. Sanders was a more aggressive person by far than ever I was—louder, with a rather coarse sense of humor. He was a games person—"

Rubin interrupted. "A sports enthusiast?"

"No, no. Indoor games. I believe he knew and could play well every card game ever invented. He could play anything else, too, that used counters, pointers, dice boards, cups, anything. He was a master at Chinese checkers, Parcheesi, backgammon, Monopoly, checkers, chess, Go, three-dimensional ticktacktoe. I couldn't even tell you the names of most of the games he played.

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"He read books on the subject and he invented games himself. Some were clever and I would suggest he patent them and place them on the market. But that wasn't what he wanted at all. It was only his own amusement that interested him. That was where I came in, you see. I was what he sharpened his analyses on."

Trumbull said, "In what way?"

"Well," said Atwood, "when I say he played those games, I don't mean in the ordinary sense. He analyzed them carefully, almost as though they involved engineering principles—"

"They do," said Rubin suddenly. "Any decent game can be analyzed mathematically. There's a whole field of recreational mathematics."

"I know this," Atwood managed to interpose gently, "but I don't know that Sanders went at it in any orthodox manner. He never offered to explain it to me and I never bothered to ask.

"Our routine over the last twenty years was to spend the weekend at the games, applying what had been learned over the week, for often he would spend time teaching me. Not out of any urge to educate, but merely to make the game more interesting for himself by improving the opposition. We might play bridge ten weeks running, then switch to gin rummy, then to something in which I had to match numbers he thought of. Naturally, he almost always won."

Drake looked at an unlit cigarette as though he wished it would light itself and said, "Didn't that depress you?"

"Not really. It was fun trying to beat him and sometimes I did. I beat him just often enough to keep up my interest."

"Do you suppose he let you win?" said Gonzalo.

"I doubt it. My victories would always either enrage or chagrin him and they would send him into a fury of further analyses. I think he enjoyed it a little, too, for when he had too long a string of unbroken victories he would start educating me. It was a strange relationship, but it worked. We were very fond of each other."

"Were?" asked Avalon.

"Yes," sighed Atwood. "He died six months ago. It was no great shock. We both saw it coming. Of course, I miss him dreadfully. The weekends are quite empty now. I even miss the rowdy way in which he poked fun at me. He bullied me constantly. He never wearied of making fun of me for being a teetotaler and he never stopped teasing me about my religion."

"He was an atheist?" asked Gonzalo.

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"Not particularly. In fact, neither of us went to church often. It's just that he was brought up one brand of Protestant and I another. He called mine 'high church' and found nothing so humorous as to tease me over the elaborateness of the worship I skipped every Sunday in comparison to the simplicity of the worship he skipped every Sunday."

Trumbull frowned. "I should think that would annoy you. Didn't you ever feel like taking a poke at him?"

"Never. It was just his way," said Atwood. "Nor need you think that poor Lyon's death was in the least suspicious. You needn't search for any motives of that kind. He died at the age of sixty-eight of complications from a mild but long-standing case of diabetes.

"He had said that he was going to leave me something in his will. He expected to die before I did, you see, and he said it was to compensate me for my patience in accepting defeat. Actually, I'm sure it was out of affection, but he would be the last to admit that.

"It was only in the last year before his death, when he knew he was failing, that this began to enter into our conversations. Naturally I protested that this was no fit subject for talk and that he merely made me uncomfortable. But he laughed one time and said, 'I won't make it easy for you, you genuflecting idol worshipper.' You see, just thinking about him makes me fall into his way of talking. I don't know that that's exactly what he called me at this time, but it was something. Anyway, leaving out the epithets, he said, 'I won't make it easy for you. We'll be playing games to the end.'

"He said that on what turned out to be his deathbed. I was all he had, except for the various hospital personnel that hovered about impersonally. He had distant relatives, but none of them visited. Then late in the evening, when I wondered if I ought to leave and return the next morning, he turned his head to me and said in a voice that seemed almost normal, 'The curious omission in Alice.'

"Naturally, I said, 'What?'

"But he laughed very weakly and said, 'That's all you get, old friend, all you get.' And his eyes closed, and he was dead."

Rubin said, "A dying hint!"

Avalon said, "You say his voice was clear?"

"Quite clear," said Atwood.

"And you heard him plainly?"

"Quite plainly," said Atwood.

"You sure he didn't say, 'The curious admission of Wallace'?"

Gonzalo said, "Or 'The furious decision in Dallas'?"

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Atwood said, "Please, I haven't finished the story. I was at the reading of the will. I was asked to be. Also present were several of the distant relatives who hadn't visited poor Lyon. There were cousins and a young grandniece. Lyon wasn't a really rich man, but he left bequests to each of them, and one to an old servant, and one to his school. I came last. I received ten thousand dollars, which had been placed in a safe-deposit box for me and for which I would be given the key on request.

"When the will was read and done with, I asked the lawyer for the key to the safe-deposit box. There's no use denying that I can find perfectly good use for ten thousand dollars. The lawyer said that I must apply to the bank in which the box was to be found. If I failed to do so in one year from that date, the bequest was revoked and was to be otherwise disposed of.

"Naturally, I asked where the bank was located, and the lawyer said that except for the fact that it was located somewhere in the United States he couldn't say. He had no further information except for one envelope which he had been instructed to hand to me and which he hoped would be useful. He had one other envelope for himself, which was to be opened at the end of one year if I had not by then claimed the money.

"I accepted my envelope and found inside only the words I had heard from my friend's dying lips. 'The curious omission in Alice.' And that's where the matter now stands."

Trumbull said, "You mean you haven't got your ten thousand dollars?"

"I mean I haven't located the bank. Six months have passed and I have six months more."

Gonzalo said, "The phrase might be an anagram. Maybe if you rearrange the letters you'll get the name of the bank."

Atwood shrugged. "It's a possibility I've thought of. I can't remember Sanders ever playing anagrams, but I've tried that sort of thing. I haven't come up with anything hopeful."

Drake, who blew his nose again and looked as though he had no patience at the moment with careful reasoning, said, "Why don't you just go into every bank in White Plains and ask if there is a key to a safe-deposit box put away in your name?"

Avalon shook his head. "Scarcely playing the game, Jim," he said severely.

"Ten thousand dollars is no game," said Gonzalo.

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Atwood said, "I admit that I would feel as though I were cheating if I simply tried to solve it by hit-or-miss, but I must also admit that I cheated. I tried the banks in several neighboring communities as well as in White Plains. I drew a blank. I'm not surprised at that, though. It's unlikely he would place it near home. He had the whole country to choose from."

"Did he make any trips out of town in the last year of his life—during the time he started talking will to you?" asked Halsted.

"I don't think so," said Atwood. "But then he wouldn't have to. His lawyer could attend to that part."

"Well," said Trumbull, "let's try it this way. You've had six months to think about it. What conclusions have you come to?"

"Nothing on the message itself," said Atwood, "but I knew my friend well. He once told me that the best way to hide something was to make use of modern technology. Any document, any record, any set of directions could be converted into microfilm, and a tiny piece of material on which that was recorded could be hidden anywhere and never be uncovered by anything but blind luck. I suppose that the message tells me where to find the microfilm."

Rubin shrugged. "That only switches the focus of the problem. Instead of having the message tell us the location of the bank, it tells us the location of the microfilm. That still leaves us with the curious omission."

"I don't think it's quite the same," said Atwood thoughtfully. "The bank may be thousands of miles away, but the piece of microfilm, or just an ordinary piece of very thin paper, for all I know, might be close at hand. But no matter how close at hand, it might as well be a thousand miles away." He sighed. "Poor Lyon will win this game, too, I'm afraid."

Trumbull said, "If we tackled the problem for you, and managed to solve it, Mr. Atwood, would you feel you had been cheating?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Atwood, "but I'd gladly accept the ten thousand just the same."

Halsted said curiously, "Have you got some idea as to the meaning of the message, Tom?"

"No," said Trumbull, "but if, as Mr. Atwood says, we're looking for a tiny message in a nearby and accessible place, and if we assumed that Mr. Sanders played fair, then maybe we could carry through some eliminations. To whom did he leave his own house, Mr. Atwood?"

"To a cousin, who has since sold it."

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"What was done with the contents? Surely Sanders had books, games of all sorts, furniture."

"Most of it was sold at auction."

"Did anything go to you?"

"The cousin was kind enough to offer me whatever I wanted of such material as was not intrinsically valuable. I didn't take anything. I'm not the collecting type myself."

"Would your old friend have known this of you?"

"Oh, yes." Atwood stirred restlessly. "Gentlemen, I've had six months to think of this. I realize that Sanders would not have hidden the film in his own house since he left it to someone else and knew I'd have no opportunity to search it. He had ample opportunity to hide it in my house, which he visited as often as I visited his, and it's in my house that I think it exists."

Trumbull said, "Not necessarily. He might have felt certain that there would be some favorite books, some certain memento, you would have asked for."

"No," said Atwood. "How could he be certain I would? He would have left such an item to me in his will."

"That would give it away," said Avalon. "Are you sure he never hinted that you ought to take something? Or that he didn't give you something casually?"

"No," said Atwood, smiling. "You have no idea how unlike Sanders that would be. I have thought that since he gave me a year to find it, he must have been pretty confident that it would stay in place for that length of time. It wouldn't be likely to be part of something I might throw away, sell, or easily lose."

There was a murmur of agreement.

Atwood said, "He might very likely have pasted it over the molding of a wall, somewhere on the undersurface of a heavy piece of furniture, say, or inside the refrigerator—"

"Have you looked?" said Gonzalo.

"Oh, yes," said Atwood. "This little game has kept me busy. I've spent considerable spare time going over moldings and undersurfaces and drawers and various insides. I've even spent time in the cellar and the attic."

"Obviously," said Trumbull, "you haven't found anything or we wouldn't be talking about it now."

"No, I haven't—but that doesn't mean anything. The thing I'm after might be so small as to be barely visible. Probably is. I could look right at it and miss it, unless I knew I was in the right place

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and was somehow *prepared* to see it, if you know what I mean."

"Which brings us back," said Avalon heavily, "to the message. If you understood it, you'd know where to look and you'd see it."

"Ah," said Atwood, "*if* I understood it."

"Well, it seems to me," said Avalon, "that the key word is 'Alice.' Does that name have any personal significance to you? Is it the name of someone you both knew? Is it the name of Sanders's dead wife, for instance? The nickname of some object? Some private joke you shared?"

"No. No to all of that."

Avalon smiled, showing his even teeth beneath his neatly trimmed, ever so slightly greying moustache. "Then I would say that 'Alice' must refer to far and away the most famous Alice in the minds of men—*Alice in Wonderland.*"

"Of *course*," said Atwood, in clear surprise. "That's what makes it a literary puzzle and why I turned to my nephew who teaches English literature. I assumed at the start it was a reference to the Lewis Carroll classic. Sanders was an *Alice* enthusiast. He had a collection of various editions of the book, and he had reproductions of the Tenniel illustrations all over the house."

"You never told us that," said Avalon in hurt tones.

Atwood said, "Haven't I? I'm sorry. It's one of those things I know so well I somehow expect everyone to know it."

"We might have expected it," said Trumbull, the corners of his mouth twisting down. "Alice involves herself with a deck of cards in the book."

"It always helps to have all pertinent information," said Avalon stiffly.

"Well, then," said Trumbull, "that brings us to the curious omission in *Alice in Wonderland.* And what curious omission is that? Have you any thoughts in that direction, Mr. Atwood?"

"No," said Atwood. "I read *Alice* as a child and have never returned to it—until the bequest, of course. I must admit I've never seen its charm."

"Good Lord," muttered Drake under his breath.

Atwood heard him, for he turned his head sharply in Drake's direction. "I don't deny there may be charm for others, but I've never seen the fun in wordplay. I'm not surprised Sanders enjoyed the book, though. His sense of humor was rather raucous and primitive. In any case, my dislike was compounded by my annoyance at having

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to detect an omission. I had no wish to study the book that closely. I hoped my nephew would help."

"A teacher of literature!" said Rubin derisively.

"Shut up, Manny," said Trumbull. "What did your nephew say, Mr. Atwood?"

"As it happens," said Atwood, "Mr. Rubin is right. My nephew was entirely at sea. He said there were a few passages in the original version of the story that Lewis Carroll had himself written in longhand that didn't appear in the final published version. As it happens, an edition of the prepublished version is available now. I obtained a copy and checked through it—I found nothing that seemed significant to me."

Gonzalo said, "Listen, where we go wrong, Henry always tells us, is in getting too damned complex. Why don't we look at the message? It says, 'The curious omission in *Alice.*' Maybe we don't have to look at the book. There is a curious omission in the message itself. The name of the book isn't *Alice.* It's *Alice in Wonderland.*"

Avalon emerged from his wounded silence long enough to say, "It's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* if you wish to be accurate."

"All right," said Gonzalo, "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Then we ought to concentrate on the rest of the title, which is *omitted* in the message. Isn't that right, Henry?"

Henry, standing quietly by the sideboard, said, "It is certainly an interesting point, Mr. Gonzalo."

"Interesting, hell," said Trumbull. "What's curious about it? It's an omission of convenience. Lots of people would say *Alice.*"

Halsted said, "Quite apart from that, I don't see what *Adventures in Wonderland* would *mean.* It's no more helpful than the original message. Here's my idea. *Alice in Wonderland*—beg pardon, Jeff, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*—contains verses, most of which are parodies of well established poems of the day—"

"Poor ones," said Rubin.

"Beside the point," said Halsted. "They're not perfect parodies, however. Some verses are omitted. For instance, Alice recites a poem beginning, 'How doth the little crocodile,' which is a parody of Isaac Watts's dreadful poem 'How doth the little busy bee,' though I don't think that's the actual title of the poem. Alice recites only two stanzas and I'm sure Watts's poem has at least four. Maybe the answer lies in the missing verses of the original."

"Is that a *curious* omission?" said Trumbull.

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"I don't know. I don't remember the original version except for the first line, but it should be looked up. The other originals to the parodies should be studied, too."

"I'll be glad to do so," said Atwood politely. "The point had not occurred to me."

Drake said, "I think that's a crock. The message refers to a curious omission in *Alice*. I think it means in *Alice* as it now stands, not in some outside source."

"You can't know that," protested Halsted.

"Yes, but that's the point," said Trumbull. "It seems to me that if we get the right answer, we'll know at once it's right, and if we work out something that only uncovers a new layer of puzzle, that's just wrong."

Avalon said, "Well, nothing more occurs to me. Do we ask Henry?"

Atwood looked puzzled, and Avalon went on, "You have to understand, Mr. Atwood, that Henry, whose pleasure it seems to be to wait on us, has the faculty for seeing beyond complications."

Gonzalo said, "That's what *I* tried to do and you all ran me down. Henry, isn't the answer in the full title of the book?"

Henry smiled regretfully and said, "Gentlemen, you must not put more on my shoulders than I can carry. I do not know the book very well, though I've read it. If I'm to penetrate the meaning of the puzzle, it will have to be very simple."

"If it were very simple," said Atwood, "we would have seen it."

"Perhaps," said Henry, "yet it seems to me it must be simple. Surely your friend, Mr. Sanders, wanted you to have the bequest. He put it in a game and made a contest out of it because that was his way, but he must have wanted you to win."

Atwood nodded. "I would think so."

"Then let's look for something very simple he felt you would surely see, but just subtle enough, perhaps, to make the game interesting. As I said, I don't know the book very well, so I'll have to ask questions."

Avalon harumphed. "I know *Alice* quite well, Henry. I'll answer your questions."

"Very well, sir. Mr. Trumbull said *Alice in Wonderland* involved a deck of cards, and I do remember, from the Disney cartoon version more than from anything else, that the Queen of Hearts kept shouting 'Off with his head!' "

"Yes," said Avalon. "A female Henry VIII. The King of Hearts and the Knave of Hearts are also involved."

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"Any other cards?"

"They're all mentioned," said Avalon. "The hearts are the royal family, the clubs are soldiers, the diamonds courtiers, the spades workmen. Three of the spades have speaking parts—the two, the five, and the nine. Do you agree with me, Atwood?"

"Yes," said Atwood grimly. "It's fresh in my mind."

Trumbull said, "I suspect Henry is going to ask if any of the cards were omitted. Only a few are mentioned specifically—"

"The six I listed," said Avalon. "The King, Queen, and Knave of Hearts; the two, five, and nine of Spades."

"But so what?" said Trumbull. "As many as necessary were mentioned and the rest were there in the background. There's nothing 'curious' about that. I insist on respecting the word 'curious.' "

Henry nodded, then said, "Are you an Episcopalian, Mr. Atwood?"

"I was brought up an Episcopalian. Why do you ask?"

"You said Mr. Sanders teased you about your 'high church' proclivities and you said you were a Protestant. Putting those together, I felt you might be an Episcopalian. Do you have a chess set, Mr. Atwood?"

"Certainly."

"Yours? Or was it a present from Mr. Sanders?"

"Oh, no—mine. A rather beautiful set that belonged to my father. Sanders and I played many a game on it."

Henry nodded. "I ask because it seems to me that we've all discussed *Alice in Wonderland* without mentioning that there was a sequel."

"Through the Looking-Glass," said Avalon. "Yes, of course."

"Might that not be considered as included in the word *Alice?"*

Avalon nodded. "As it happens, the full title is *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There,* so it surely bears as much right to be referred to as *Alice* as the other does."

"And isn't *Through the Looking-Glass* about chessmen?"

"Absolutely," said Avalon benevolently, his role as recognized expert having completely restored his good humor. "The Red and White Queens are important characters. The White King has a speaking role, but the Red King just sleeps under a tree."

"And there are knights, too?"

Avalon nodded. "The White Knight has a battle with the Red Knight and then escorts Alice to the final square. He's the most amiable character in either book and the only one who seems to like Alice. He's usually considered a self-portrait by Carroll."

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"Yes, yes," said Trumbull testily. "What are you getting at, Henry?"

"I'm looking for omissions. There is a reference to a white pawn at the start of the book, I think."

Avalon said, "I don't think you're as unknowledgeable about the books as you pretend, Henry. There *is* a mention of a white pawn named Lily in the first chapter. Alice herself plays the part of a white pawn, too, and is eventually promoted to a white queen."

"And rooks?" said Henry.

Avalon frowned in silence for a while, then shook his head.

Atwood interposed. "There's a reference to them. Take my word for it—I know the stupid books practically by heart. In chapter one, Alice enters the Looking-Glass house, sees chessmen moving about, and says to herself, And here are two Castles walking arm in arm. The castles, of course, are also called rooks."

Henry said, "That accounts, then, for the King, Queen, Rook, Knight, and Pawn. But there is a sixth chesspiece, the Bishop. Does it play a role in the book or is it even mentioned?"

Avalon said, "No."

Atwood said, "Two bishops are shown in one of the illustrations to the first chapter."

"That's Tenniel's work," said Henry, "not Carroll's. Now isn't the total absence of the Bishop a curious omission?"

"I don't know," said Avalon slowly. "Lewis Carroll, a thoroughgoing Victorian, probably feared giving offense to the Church."

"Isn't it curious to have him go so far in avoiding offense?"

"Well, supposing it is?" asked Halsted.

Henry said, "I think it possible that if Mr. Atwood checks the four bishops of his set, a set Mr. Sanders knew Mr. Atwood cherished and would neither sell, give away, nor lose, he will probably find the piece of film. If the head comes off, he should look inside. If the head doesn't come off, pull off the piece of felt it stands on."

There was an uncomfortable silence. "That's farfetched, Henry," said Trumbull.

"Perhaps not, sir," said Henry. "Mr. Sanders has more than once been described as having a raucous sense of humor. He teased Mr. Atwood constantly about his religion. Perhaps this final message is another way of continuing the joke. You are an Episcopalian, Mr. Atwood, and I suppose you know what the word means."

"It's from the Greek word for bishop," said Atwood, half choking.

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"I imagine, then," said Henry, "Mr. Sanders might think it funny to hide the message in a bishop."

Atwood started to his feet. "I think I'd better go home."

"I'll take you," said Halsted.

"I think the snow has stopped," said Henry, "but drive carefully."

DETECTIVERSE

POST MORTEM

by LEA LEVAVI

He cheated, swindled, stole and lied
Or so they said until he died.
But at his funeral they cried
And all his treachery denied.

A mourner read a eulogy
About his generosity.
Another asked, amid her tears,
"Why was he given so few years?"

I wondered then, and wonder still,
Are you so sure "thou shalt not kill"?
Alive, he filled us all with dread
But look how much we love him dead!

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a classic radioplay by

ELLERY QUEEN

The following is an excerpt from the letter Ellery Queen wrote to introduce this adventure in his rare first-edition 1944 anthology, The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes:

Dear Mr. Holmes:

For many years, in company with the legion of your devoted followers, I have been fascinated by the numerous references of Dr. Watson to your unrecorded cases.

By an understandable perversity of the mind, my imagination has seized with special zest upon those unrecorded cases of yours which, as Watson points out so forthrightly, you failed to solve.

I can well imagine your irritation at reading the good doctor's blunt statement in "The Problem of Thor Bridge" that you had fizzled a number of cases, among them the singular affair of Mr. James Phillimore who, "stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world."

No one likes to be reminded of his failures. I would not do so now, if not for my certainty that you will be professionally interested in my remarkable experience . . . Early in the year of 1943, my father, Inspector Richard Queen, brought to my attention the case of Mr. James Phillimore of New York, who stepped back into his own house as if to get his umbrella (after anxiously studying the sky for signs of rain) and to all intents and purposes vanished from this world!

I gave the facts to the world in a radio broadcast. It may be that you were not tuned in that evening—there are so many detective-story programs, and you must be heartily sick of them. If you did not hear the modern version, here is the full story as I unfolded it that night on the air.

ELLERY QUEEN

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THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MR. JAMES PHILLIMORE

by ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

MR. JAMES PHILLIMORE	*who disappears*
BIGGS	*his man*
COAL MAN	*briefly*
TELEGRAPH MESSENGER	*briefly*
NIKKI PORTER	*Ellery's secretary*
INSPECTOR QUEEN	*Ellery's father*
SERGEANT VELIE	*the Inspector's subordinate*
ELLERY QUEEN	*who solves a difficult case, perforce, on his back*
and	
SHERLOCK HOLMES	*present in spirit only*

The Scenes

The Queen Apartment—Mr. Phillimore's House

SCENE I: *The Queen Apartment*

(ELLERY *is in bed with a cold.* NIKKI *is firmly ministering to him.*)

NIKKI: Drink the rest of your orange juice, Ellery.

ELLERY: But Nikki, I don't *want* orange juice. I want to get out of bed. (*He has a coughing spell*)

NIKKI: With that cough? Drink it.

ELLERY: Nikki, it's just a cold—and we've got a lot of work to do on my novel—

NIKKI: You're staying in bed, Mr. Queen, until you stop coughing. You can dictate from bed.

ELLERY: (*Grumpily*) *All* right. Get your notebook.

NIKKI: Never knew a man yet who didn't act like a puppy with a sore nose when he was sick. (*Door opens off*) Inspector?

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INSPECTOR: Yes, Nikki. How's the sick man? (ELLERY *coughs*) Say, that's a bad cough, son.

NIKKI: And he wants to get out of bed, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: (*Grimly*) Oh, he does? Well, he's not going to. (*Chuckles*) It's a shame, too.

ELLERY: What's a shame? What are you looking so gay about, Dad?

INSPECTOR: It's a great day, son. Yes, sir! I've got a rendezvous with Velie to close the book on the career of a bird who should have been in jail years ago.

ELLERY: Who's that, Dad?

INSPECTOR: Little Jim.

ELLERY: Little *Jim?* (*Groans*)

NIKKI: *Who* is Little Jim, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: James Phillimore, Nikki—The 20 Percent King.

ELLERY: And I have to be laid up! I'm getting out of—

INSPECTOR: You're staying right where you are. (*Wickedly*) We were tipped off that Little Jim made a reservation on this morning's plane to South America. So I threw a squad around his house last night and we'll grab Mr. Phillimore when he leaves with that satchel full of John Q. Public's dough.

NIKKI: What's his racket, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: He "invests" your money for you. Guarantees 20 percent interest.

NIKKI: But how can he keep paying 20 percent?

ELLERY: It's very simple, Nikki. Little Jim takes your $100, pays out $20—that leaves him $80.

NIKKI: But Ellery, he can't do that indefinitely.

INSPECTOR: There's always a fresh crop of suckers, Nikki. The new money keeps paying off the old interest.

NIKKI: But eventually a lot of people must want *all* their money back.

ELLERY: When that unhappy moment comes, Nikki, Little Jim packs up the remaining assets and departs hastily for cooler climes. Same old story, Dad. Remember William F. Miller and his "Franklin Syndicate" in 1899?

INSPECTOR: Yep. Well, this time Little Jim waited too long. So we're going to recover the sucker money and wrap Mr. James Phillimore up for immediate delivery to the D.A. Nikki, take care of Ellery.

NIKKI: I will, Inspector. (INSPECTOR *exits*)

ELLERY: Blast it . . . Dad! Let me know how you make out!

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SCENE 2: *Exterior of the Phillimore House*

(SERGEANT VELIE *is skulking behind a bush.* INSPECTOR QUEEN *approaches surreptitiously.*)

VELIE: Hi, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Morning, Velie. How goes it?

VELIE: Smooth as a baby's neck, Inspector. Not a soul's left the house since we checked Little Jim in last night. I've been watchin' from the front gate here. Huh . . . Here comes Little Jim now!

INSPECTOR: Marching out of his front door with his black bag, stroking his Vandyke beard like a dandy. Down, Velie! Let him walk right into the arms of the law.

VELIE: What a runt.

INSPECTOR: Five-foot-one of pure cussedness. Wait a minute—why's he stopped? What's he looking up at the sky for?

VELIE: (*Intently*) Says to himself: "Looks like rain. So I'll turn around and go back into the house for an umbrella—" and there he goes, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: Where, Velie? I've lost him under that portico in front of the door! Let's get closer—I want to make sure he doesn't pull a sneak. (*They hurry towards the house, dodging from bush to bush*)

VELIE: That little twerp is li'ble to pull anything. There he is, Inspector! See him now?

INSPECTOR: Yeah. Back into the house. (*Front door slams*) We'll wait right here, Velie, till he comes out again. Got to nab him with that bag on him.

VELIE: Inspector, if Little Jim gets outa this house without us or the boys spotting him, he ain't a fraud artist—he's a magician!

SCENE 3: *Same, Fifteen Minutes Later*

(INSPECTOR QUEEN *paces in front of the Phillimore house restlessly.* SERGEANT VELIE *appears from the side driveway.*)

INSPECTOR: Well, Velie? What do the men say?

VELIE: They say nobody's left the house, Inspector. So Little Jim's still inside.

INSPECTOR: Fifteen minutes to get an umbrella? Use your head, Velie! Phillimore spotted us—he's up to something. I'm not waiting any longer! (*They run to the front door*) Ring that bell, Velie!

VELIE: (*Rings bell*) I tell ya, Inspector, it's O.K. (*Door opens*) Uh, uh. Who's *this* beanpole?

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BIGGS: (*A very tall thin man*) Yes, sir?
INSPECTOR: Where's Little Jim?
BIGGS: Beg pardon, sir?
INSPECTOR: James Phillimore! Where is he?
BIGGS: Oh. Mr. Phillimore is not here, sir.
VELIE: Now, listen, Daddy Longlegs, Little Jim came outa here fifteen minutes ago, ducked right back in—and he ain't been out since.
INSPECTOR: I'm Inspector Queen of Police Headquarters. Quit stalling! Where's Phillimore?
BIGGS: But you must be mistaken, sir. Mr. Phillimore did leave fifteen minutes ago, but I didn't see him return—
INSPECTOR: Well, we did. Velie, search the house. I'll wait here in the foyer with this man.
VELIE: (*Going*) Phillimore's last stand, huh? Playin' hard to get. (*He disappears up the front staircase*)
INSPECTOR: So you're covering up for him. Who are you?
BIGGS: Mr. Phillimore's man, sir, Jonathan Biggs, sir.
INSPECTOR: (*Chuckling*) Quite a team, aren't you? Phillimore's a five-footer and you're six-foot-four, Mr. Biggs, if you're an inch.
BIGGS: Yes, sir. Mr. Phillimore wouldn't engage anyone but a very tall person. He's *so* sensitive about his height, sir.
INSPECTOR: Yes, these little guys cause all the trouble.
BIGGS: I wouldn't know about that, sir. But Mr. Phillimore gets *furious* if you refer to him as "little." That's why he wears a beard, sir. (*Confidentially*) I believe it makes him feel bigger and more masterful.
INSPECTOR: Well, he'll get a quick trim in Sing Sing. (*Calling*) Velie! What's taking you so long?
VELIE: (*From upstairs*) I guess Jimmy-boy wants to play peekaboo, Inspector.
INSPECTOR: I'll peekaboo *him*. Biggs, why's it so cold in this house? Run out of oil-ration coupons?
BIGGS: Oh, no, sir. We burn coal.
INSPECTOR: Then why don't you burn some? The temperature here would discourage an Eskimo.
BIGGS: I was about to go down to the cellar, sir, when you arrived. We're expecting a coal delivery this morning—I was going to put the last few shovelsful in the furnace . . .
INSPECTOR: Don't let me keep you. But come right back. (BIGGS *leaves*) Brr. (*Calling*) Velie, how long does it take to find one man in one house?

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VELIE: (*From upstairs*) You tell me, Inspector! I'm still lookin'!

SCENE 4: *Interior, Phillimore House, Later*

INSPECTOR QUEEN *is still in the foyer;* BIGGS *has returned from the cellar.* SERGEANT VELIE *appears, shaking his head.*)

INSPECTOR: What's the matter, Velie? Where's Little Jim?

VELIE: Inspector, I'm baffled.

BIGGS: I told you, sir—Mr. Phillimore isn't here.

INSPECTOR: Then you didn't cover everything, Velie.

VELIE: Izzat so? I looked my eyes out! Every room.

INSPECTOR: Velie, I'm in no mood for gags.

VELIE: (*Hotly*) Who's gaggin'? I'm not gaggin', Inspector. He ain't here.

INSPECTOR: Did you look in the basement? The attic? All the closets?

VELIE: I tell ya I looked every place, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: But—Velie, you stay here in the house. I'll send a few of the boys in to help you make another search. Meanwhile, you—Biggs—don't leave this house. Is that clear?

BIGGS: Perfectly, sir.

INSPECTOR: Velie, keep your eye on this long drink of water. He's too smooth to suit *me*. Another thing. I'm giving strict orders to the men on duty outside that no one leaves this house except you and me, Velie, unless he's got one of my cards as a pass—and signed by me, to boot!

VELIE: But Inspector, I tell you Little Jim ain't here.

INSPECTOR: (*Angry*) He *must* be here! Biggs, get out of my way. I'm going home and talk to Ellery!

SCENE 5: *The Queen Apartment*

INSPECTOR QUEEN *has returned home and told* ELLERY, *still sick in bed, the astonishing story of the man who went back into his house for an umbrella and vanished. The* INSPECTOR, NIKKI, *and* ELLERY *are in* ELLERY'S *bedroom.*)

ELLERY: You've got it all down, Nikki?

NIKKI: Yes, Ellery. Full description of Mr. Phillimore's house and all the rooms.

ELLERY: Now, Dad. You and Velie saw James Phillimore come out through the front door. You saw him pause, look up at the sky, and . . . you *unquestionably* saw him go back inside?

INSPECTOR: How many times do I have to tell you? He went back in!

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ELLERY: Then that's a fact. (*He reflects earnestly*) After Little Jim went back into the house, no one left it, you say?
INSPECTOR: My men had every possible exit covered, son.
ELLERY: Obviously, then, Little Jim is still in there.
NIKKI: But Ellery, Sergeant Velie and the other detectives searched every nook and cranny!
ELLERY: That's what makes this such an interesting problem, Nikki. Dad, let's start at the bottom of the house and work up. How about the cellar?
INSPECTOR: Solid concrete. Floor, ceiling, walls all tapped.
ELLERY: Any packing cases in the cellar? Old trunks?
INSPECTOR: No. All we found down there are two coal bins. One empty, the other with a couple of shovelsful of coal in it. The basement's out, Ellery.
ELLERY: The ground floor—?
NIKKI: Three rooms—living room, study, kitchen.
ELLERY: Living room first. Dad, how about the fireplace?
INSPECTOR: Thoroughly investigated. Also all the walls, floor, ceiling—not only in that room but in every room in the house, Ellery.
ELLERY: Does the living room have a grand piano?
INSPECTOR: By Jove, yes! I wonder if Velie looked in there.
ELLERY: Note, Nikki: Search interior of piano. (NIKKI *makes a note*) Now—the kitchen. Closets? Pantry?
INSPECTOR: All covered.
ELLERY: Refrigerator? Remember, Phillimore's only five foot one and skinny as a spindle.
INSPECTOR: I'd better check with Velie on that, son.
NIKKI: (*As if noting*) Check . . . refrigerator.
ELLERY: The study. Is there a safe?
INSPECTOR: Yes. Phillimore's man, Biggs, opened it for us. Nothing in the safe but unimportant papers.
ELLERY: What about the foyer, Dad?
INSPECTOR: Suit of armor.
NIKKI: I'll bet that's it!
INSPECTOR: You'd lose, Nikki. We looked inside.
NIKKI: I suppose all the closets were searched, too?
INSPECTOR: Every one in the house, upstairs and down. *And* the bathrooms. And the attic—and the roof.
ELLERY: That's the whole house, then. No! The garage—
INSPECTOR: We went through it.

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ELLERY: Did you search the car?
INSPECTOR: I left that to Velie. However, I'd better check it personally. Note car trunk compartment, Nikki.
ELLERY: Nikki, go back to Phillimore's house with Dad. When Dad's checked the piano, refrigerator, and car, phone me the results.
NIKKI: I can see it coming, though—Mr. James Phillimore isn't hiding in any of those places, Ellery!
ELLERY: I'm inclined to agree, Nikki. Toughest case all winter, and I have to investigate it on my back!

SCENE 6: *The Phillimore House, Later*

(INSPECTOR QUEEN, NIKKI, VELIE, *and* BIGGS *are in the lower hall. A doorbell rings from the rear of the house.*)
INSPECTOR: Biggs, what's that bell?
BIGGS: The rear door, Inspector. (*They all troop into the kitchen*)
INSPECTOR: Velie, unlock it and slide the bolt.
VELIE: Uh-huh. (*He obeys and opens door. A workman with sooty hands and face stands outside*) Yeah?
COAL MAN: Coal company. Got two tons to deliver.
NIKKI: It's about time. It was warm here for a while, but now it's getting cold again.
COAL MAN: Well, if it's O.K. . . .
VELIE: Now, now. Don't step inside, fella.
INSPECTOR: Velie, go outside with this man. Let him run his coal chute into the cellar window to the bin, but he's not to set foot in any part of the house.
VELIE: Yes, sir. Anybody with you, my anthracite friend?
COAL MAN: I got a helper.
INSPECTOR: Stick with both of 'em every second, Velie. (VELIE *leaves*; INSPECTOR *locks and bolts the door*) Now, Nikki, let's you and I search those places Ellery mentioned!

SCENE 7: *The Same, Later*

(*The rear doorbell rings.* INSPECTOR QUEEN *unlocks and unbolts the door.*)
INSPECTOR: Oh, Velie. Well? What's about the coal?
VELIE: It's in, Inspector.
COAL MAN: (*From behind* VELIE) Hey, this big guy says I gotta have a pass to let me and my helper out. What goes here, anyway? (*The* INSPECTOR *makes out a pass and signs it*)

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INSPECTOR: Here's your pass. Velie, go out with 'em—and better examine that truck, just to make sure. (VELIE *and the* COAL MAN *leave, and the* INSPECTOR *refastens the door*) Nikki! Where are you?

NIKKI: (*From another room*) In the study alcove off the foyer, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: Whom are you talking to, Nikki? (*He joins her in the study alcove*)

NIKKI: Ellery—on the phone. He's furious.

ELLERY: (*On the telephone throughout*) Nothing in the piano, Nikki?

NIKKI: Only strings and sounding board, Ellery.

ELLERY: Don't be cute! Refrigerator?

NIKKI: Filled with goodies. Which reminds me. I'm starved.

ELLERY: (*Groaning*) A man vanishes like the Cheshire cat and she's hungry! What about the car in the garage?

NIKKI: He's not in it, Ellery. Now what shall I tell the Inspector to do?

ELLERY: Blessed if I know. Anything new happen?

NIKKI: A coal truck just delivered two tons of coal.

ELLERY: What! (*Excitedly*) Let me talk to Dad!

NIKKI: Your celebrated son wishes a word with you, Inspector. (*She hands the telephone to* INSPECTOR QUEEN)

INSPECTOR: Now Ellery, keep your shirt on. I kept the two coal men from entering the house and Velie was with 'em every minute. So Little Jim can't have sneaked out through the cellar window.

ELLERY: I realize that, Dad. But don't you realize that he may be playing hide-and-go-seek with you?

INSPECTOR: Come again?

ELLERY: While you were searching one part of the house, Phillimore may have been hiding in another part. When you came to *his* part, he slipped off to still another place! How do you know he wasn't in the coal bin when the coal started sliding down the chute? How do you know he isn't buried under the coal *at this moment?*

INSPECTOR: I'm ready to believe anything.

ELLERY: You'd better check, Dad. And call me back.

INSPECTOR: All right. (*He hangs up*)

NIKKI: What's Ellery say, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: (*Groaning*) As soon as Velie gets back into the house, Nikki—we start shoveling coal!

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NIKKI: And for goodness' sake, Inspector, while you're at it, put some in that furnace.

SCENE 8: *The Same, Later*

INSPECTOR: Well, Velie?

VELIE: Shovel coal! Keep the furnace going! What else do you gotta do on this job? Look at me! My wife'll have a fit.

INSPECTOR: Never mind your wife. Did you transfer all that coal to the other bin?

VELIE: Yeah! (*Cunningly*) And guess what we found under that coal, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: (*Biting eagerly*) What, Velie?

VELIE: Coal dust! (*The telephone rings*)

NIKKI: I'll get it. Hello? Just a minute, Ellery! Inspector, it's Ellery and he's all agog.

INSPECTOR: (*Taking the telephone*) Hello, son.

ELLERY: Dad! Was Little Jim under the coal?

INSPECTOR: He was not! Any more bright ideas, Mr. Queen?

ELLERY: Mmm. Well, the coal was a long shot. But we had to eliminate it. Dad, I know where James Phillimore is!

INSPECTOR: (*Belligerently*) Where?

ELLERY: In the only place left for him to hide.

INSPECTOR: I'm still listening.

ELLERY: You said Phillimore's study is off the foyer. You listed all the study furniture. But Dad, you left out one thing.

INSPECTOR: You're lying there in bed halfway across town and you're telling me I left out something? What?

ELLERY: A study usually has a desk. You didn't mention one.

INSPECTOR: I didn't? Well, it's a fact there *is* a desk here . . . By thunder, Ellery, you're right! And it's one of those old-fashioned rolltop desks at that! Hold on. Velie! Ellery's solved it.

NIKKI: He has, Inspector?

VELIE: Where's he say Little Jim's hidin'?

INSPECTOR: In that rolltop desk, Velie. Search it!

VELIE: Say, we did miss that before. (*Grim*) Phillimore, come outa there. (*He slides the top open*) Huh?

NIKKI: It's empty.

INSPECTOR: Solved it! (*He barks into the telephone*) Ellery! You were wrong, my son. The desk is empty.

ELLERY: But it can't be— (*The front doorbell rings*)

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INSPECTOR: Hang on a minute, Ellery. Velie, answer the front doorbell.
BIGGS: (*Appearing*) But I'll answer it, sir.
INSPECTOR: Biggs, you'll stay where you are! Velie, who is it?
VELIE: (*Off*) Telegraph boy, Inspector, with a wire for Biggs.
BIGGS: (*Eagerly*) I'll take that, sir—
INSPECTOR: You will not. Don't move. Velie, grab that wire.
ELLERY: (*Through the telephone*) Dad, who's that wire from?
INSPECTOR: Wait, this phone has a long cord—I'll take it out into the foyer. Hold on, son. Nikki, take the phone. Velie, give me that wire.
VELIE: Here you are, Inspector. Biggs, stand still.
BIGGS: But it's my wire, sir.
NIKKI: (*Into telephone*) The Inspector's opening the telegram, Ellery.
ELLERY: For pity's sake, what's it say, Nikki?
INSPECTOR: (*Spluttering*) But—but it *can't* be! It's impossible!
MESSENGER: Can I please have a pass or somethin' to get outa here? The guy at the gate says I gotta have a pass. I got other telegrams to deliver, you know.
INSPECTOR: Here, Velie. Give him this pass.
VELIE: Now scram, squirt. (*The* MESSENGER *exits, front door closes*) What's the wire say, Inspector?
INSPECTOR: Nikki, hand me that phone. Ellery, listen to this! I can't believe it—
ELLERY: (*Shouting*) Can't believe *what?*
INSPECTOR: It's from James Phillimore! Yes! It's addressed to his man, Biggs, and it says: GOT OUT OF HOUSE AS PLANNED. BRING CLOTHES AND PAPERS TO MEETING PLACE AGREED ON. Signed—JAMES PHILLIMORE.
BIGGS: (*Snarling*) Out of my way!
INSPECTOR: Velie, grab that man. Don't let Biggs get away.
VELIE: Oh, no, you don't, flunkey— (*He grabs* BIGGS *and they struggle*)
NIKKI: Sergeant—look out—
VELIE: Oh, yeah? (*He tries vainly to get* BIGGS *down on the floor*)
ELLERY: Dad, for heaven's sake, what's going on there?
INSPECTOR: Biggs tried to beat it. Velie's wrestling with him—trying to get him down on the floor, but he can't. (*Sarcastically*) What's the matter, Velie—didn't you have your vitamins today?
VELIE: (*Panting*) I can't get this guy off his feet. O.K., brother, I'll cut you down to size! (*He punches* BIGGS *on the jaw.* BIGGS *crashes to the floor*)

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NIKKI: What a fall was there, my countrymen.
INSPECTOR: Velie's got Biggs, son. But how did Little Jim get out of the house? I'll swear nobody left here!
ELLERY: Yes . . . (*Chuckles*) . . . Yes, of course!
INSPECTOR: Yes, of course *what*, Ellery?
ELLERY: Of course I know where Little Jim is!
INSPECTOR: Is that so? You thought you knew once before, Ellery, and you were wrong!
ELLERY: Dad, this time I'm positive. I've solved the problem of James Phillimore—the man who stepped back into his own house to get his umbrella and was never more seen in this world!

(But do *you* know how James Phillimore vanished? You can gain additional enjoyment by stopping at this point and trying to figure out the correct answer and the logical reasoning that led up to that answer, just as thousands of listeners matched wits with Ellery Queen when this story was originally broadcast on NBC's Red Network in January 1943.)

THE SOLUTION

SCENE 9: *The Same, Immediately After*

INSPECTOR: You've *solved* it, son? But what—where—how?
ELLERY: Never mind now, Dad. Did you ask the telegraph messenger the obvious question?
INSPECTOR: Did I—*What* obvious question?
ELLERY: Oh, lord. Dad, maybe it's still not too late. Where's the boy now?
INSPECTOR: He just left. Wait a minute—I still see him through the foyer window. Piggott's examining the pass I just gave him, at the front gate.
ELLERY: Good. Hold the boy, Dad, and bring him to me here. I'll ask him that question myself!

SCENE 10: *The Queen Apartment, Later*

VELIE: O.K., so we've got the messenger boy outside your bedroom, Maestro. Now what?
ELLERY: Fine, Sergeant. Keep the boy there for a moment.
INSPECTOR: What I want to know, son, is—where's James Phillimore?
NIKKI: Yes, Ellery—how did he get out of the house with a dozen detectives watching every possible exit?

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ELLERY: Elementary, Nikki. Dad, just answer my questions. Is Little Jim in that house now?

INSPECTOR: No, son. I'll stake my shield on *that.*

ELLERY: If he isn't *in* the house, then he must be *outside* the house. Right?

NIKKI: Naturally.

ELLERY: How many people left the house during the day, Dad?—Not including yourselves or the detectives.

INSPECTOR: I told you a dozen times, Ellery: *No*body left that house.

ELLERY: Oh, but that's not so, Dad. *Three* people left it.

VELIE: Three? Inspector, he's delirious.

ELLERY: Come, come, didn't the coal men come to the house and then leave it? That makes two—

INSPECTOR: But they never stepped into the house, Ellery!

VELIE: And I was with 'em every second while they sent the coal down the chute from outside the house, Maestro. I even examined the truck before they left.

INSPECTOR: So Little Jim wasn't in the truck, and he wasn't one of the coal men, Ellery.

ELLERY: Oh, you're quite right about that. So that eliminates two of the three persons who left the house. Therefore, the *third* person must be Little Jim.

NIKKI: (*Excited*) I've got it! Ellery, you're wrong! Little Jim never left the house at all, Inspector!

INSPECTOR: But Nikki, we searched it from top to bottom. If he was in the house all the time, *where* was he?

NIKKI: He was in front of your eyes, Inspector. Little Jim was . . . *Biggs, the servant!*

VELIE: He played two parts? Say . . .

INSPECTOR: Phillimore is five foot one, Nikki. Biggs is six foot four!

NIKKI: (*Airily*) He faked the extra height, Inspector. Used stilts, or something.

ELLERY: Stilts? No, Nikki. Velie actually wrestled with Biggs and couldn't even get him *off his feet!* If Biggs were on stilts, no matter how strong he was, *you* could have pushed him over, Nikki. No—call in that telegraph boy, Sergeant, and I'll ask him the obvious question Dad forgot. (VELIE *brings in the* MESSENGER)

INSPECTOR: (*Exasperated*) What obvious question, for Pete's sake?

VELIE: Here's the boy, Maestro.

MESSENGER: (*Fearfully*) What—what do you want, mister?

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ELLERY: I want to ask you a question, sonny. (*Chuckles*) Here it is: you're James Phillimore, aren't you? (*There is a moment of complete silence*)

INSPECTOR: *He's* Little Jim, Ellery? This *boy?*

ELLERY: What makes him a boy, Dad? His small size. His clean-shaven cheeks. His messenger's uniform. His high-pitched voice. No, no, he's not a boy—he's a man. James Phillimore, in fact. He must be. He's the only other person who left the house.

MESSENGER: (*Backing away*) Think you're clever, don't you?

VELIE: Stand still!

INSPECTOR: (*Softly*) I get it.

NIKKI: But Ellery, how did he leave the house in the first place in order to *come back* as the messenger?

ELLERY: He didn't leave at all, Nikki.

INSPECTOR: Now I see it! He prepared his escape in advance. He had this telegraph messenger's uniform ready. And a telegram, which he'd sent to himself some time ago. All he had to do today was change the date and reseal the envelope.

ELLERY: Yes, Dad, and when he spotted you this morning waiting for him outside the house, he quickly went back in, shaved off his beard, put on the uniform, told Biggs to play stupid, and then hid in the only place you did *not* search—

INSPECTOR: The rolltop desk!

ELLERY: Precisely. Just before I phoned about the desk, he saw that the coast was clear—nobody was in the study or foyer. So he jumped out of the desk, ran to the front door, opened it, went out and stood in the portico—

VELIE: Then why didn't Piggott at the front gate see him, Ellery?

ELLERY: He couldn't, Sergeant. Remember when you and Dad first saw Little Jim re-enter the house this morning, Dad said you'd "lost" him—couldn't see him in the portico until you got *closer* to the front door? . . . So then Phillimore rang the bell, delivered his "telegram," and calmly asked for a pass to get him off the premises!

(INSPECTOR QUEEN, SERGEANT VELIE, *and* JAMES PHILLIMORE *exeunt*)

NIKKI: That was a mighty clever plot, Ellery.

ELLERY: Wasn't it? I especially call to your attention, my dear Nikki, the brilliant wording of Little Jim's spurious telegram. It convinced Inspector Queen that this daring criminal had escaped, when all the time he was *in* the house waiting for a pass from the Inspector himself to get him out!

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USED and collectible mysteries! Free list. Absolutely Books, 3202 E. Greenway #1273, Phoenix, AZ 85032.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

ARTICLES, assistance needed for proposed quarterly COLUMBO NEWSLETTER, 412 Smithfield Street, Suite 279, Pittsburgh, PA 15222.

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective Classified Ad. Also includes certificate worth $5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send $3.75 (includes postage) to: Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

WORLD'S largest mystery stock. Search Service. Free catalogues. Limited Editions. Aardvarks Book Detectives, P.O. Box 585070, Orlando, FL 32858.

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EXCELLENT pay & easy work taking snapshots. Send self-addressed stamped envelope to: Edythe Bernstein, 1260 NE 124 St., North Miami, FL 33161.

$500 A DAY IN YOUR MAILBOX. $1 Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope. Charles Wilkerson, 280 Eunice Dunnville Rd., Columbia, Kentucky 42728.

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BUY IT WHOLESALE

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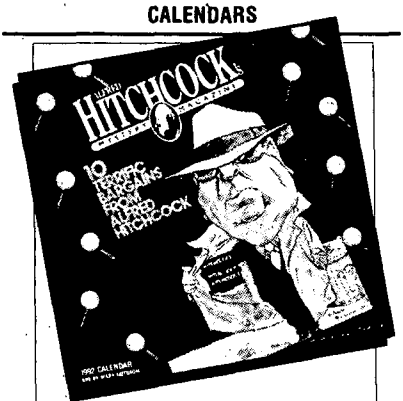
included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Director, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

CALENDARS



Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine 1992 Calendar

Order this 1992 calendar by sending a check or money order (no cash) to:

Davis Publications
Calendars - Dept. M
380 Lexington Ave.
NY, NY 10168-0035

In the US, please include price of calendar, **$9.95** (*NYC residents please add 8¼% sales tax*) plus **$2.75** for shipping and handling for the first calendar, each additional calendar add **$.50**.

In Canada, remit US dollars, include the price of the calendar plus **$4.00** for shipping and handling for the first calendar, each additional calendar **$1.75**.

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IT'S NO MYSTERY! Using Zip Codes in your ad assures more responses! AND, when replying to an ad, make sure your request is properly addressed.

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High in the mountains of central Vermont, on a secluded 1,000 acre estate, a murder is about to be committed. Take part in the intrigue. Examine all clues. Try to solve the crime.

The mystery begins promptly at 9 p.m. Friday, unravelling throughout the weekend. Should you solve the crime, you win a weekend for two.

Join us for 1, 2, 3 or all 4 murder weekends. Each one has a different theme: Oct. 25-27, Nov. 8-10, Nov. 15-17 & Dec. 6-8, 1991. $245 p.p. includes 2 nights accommodation overlooking the mountains and lake, dinner Sat., 2 breakfasts and all amenities. Please add 15% service charge and 8% tax. Space is limited, so call today:

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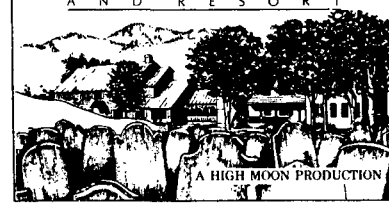

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SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

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ASIAN WOMEN desire friendship, marriage! Free details, photos! SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE, Box 5500-HF, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii 96745. (808) 325-7707.

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BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE BRITISH GENTLEMEN seek friendship/romance/marriage with American ladies & gentlemen! All ages! Free details: ENGLISH ROSE AGENCY, (Dept C3), 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, ENGLAND. TEL: 011-44-843-290735.

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RECIPES—Cont'd

CRIMINALLY-good gumbo, other unique recipes! Send long sase, $5: Wells, Box 5084, Eureka, CA 95502.

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$1,200.00 CASH PRIZE. Poems Wanted For New Songs - Recordings - Publishing. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 34278.

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OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

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A $14.98 value
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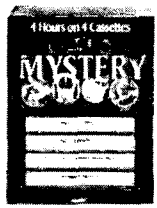

Includes: Sherlock Holmes, The Green Hornet, Alfred Hitchcock and The Third Man
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DRIVE your friends nuts at your next party with Black Ink™ Mystery Parties. Send $2.00 for our catalog, today! Tokoro Publishing, Route 6, Box 250-V, Astoria, OR 97103.

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ELLERY QUEEN

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $52.50 for 15 Words or Less
$3.50 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.50 each $ _____
_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $
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(c) Total amount for 3 ads $

(Example: One 15 word ad $52.50 x 3 months = $157.50 x .85 = $133.87)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

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(26) **$91.00**	(27) **$94.50**	(28) **$98.00**	(29) **$101.50**	(30) **$105.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017. 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York, 2 words. Abbreviations such as C O D. F O B. PO. U S A. 7x10. 35mm count as 1 word (PO Box 145 count as 3 words). Websters International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling compound words. hyphens. abbreviations. etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

NEXT...

Our special holiday issue—including

PETER LOVESEY (about supper with Miss Shivers)

JOYCE PORTER (about the Hon. Con)

JAMES POWELL (about Santa's last sleigh-ride)

CORNELL WOOLRICH (Golden 13 reprint)

GEORGES SIMENON ("Maigret's Christmas")

plus your 1991 EQMM Readers Award ballot

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Please send my 4 books, plus my 5th book free that I've indicated at right.
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__#53 Prime Crimes 3
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__#50 Memorable Characters
__#47 Lost Men
__Anthology #46
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Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery (Outside US add $6.00).

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▼ EVERYTHING BAG

People on the go always have so much to carry around. The Everything Bag makes it a snap. This oversized shoulder bag is constructed of tough, water-resistant canvas material and features nine roomy pockets. Plus, an unusual zipper design enables the bag to expand to double its normal width—to a full eight inches. Adjustable 2" wide straps provides a real comfort feature. In 3 great colors. **$24.98** ($4.00) #A1955-Blue; #A1956-Khaki; #A1957-Gray.

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Most of the convenience waxes you buy actually dry out wood instead of nourishing it. What's the alternative? Our choice is Williamsville Wax. It is made of beeswax and lemon oil, heat-blended with other natural oils. It can be used on any type of wood, any type of finish, on paneling or kitchen cabinets as well as fine furniture. Williamsville Wax is super for restoring neglected or mistreated wood. Two 8-oz. bottles cost **$13.98** ($3.25) #A14312.

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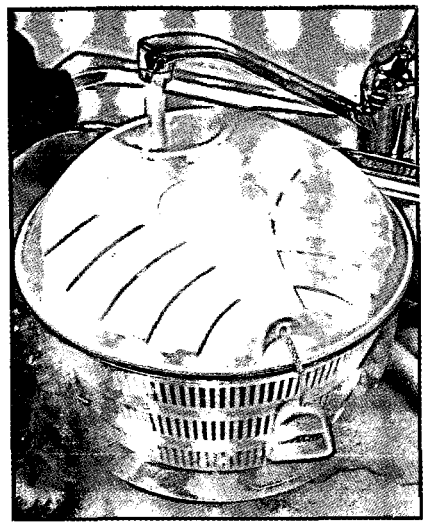

The Jet Spin Washer/Dryer for salad greens and vegetables, does a better job with less effort than any other method of preparation. As the stream of water hits the spinning inner basket, it bursts into spray, giving the contents a good drenching before being carried off by centrifugal action. Flywheel action keeps basket spinning with only a few gentle tugs. Spray wash coaxes dirt and grit from innermost lettuce wrinkles. Turn off the faucet and with a few more tugs the remaining water spins away, leaving you with crisp clean salad greens, so dry they are positively perky. Also works for fruits and vegetables. The Jet Salad Washer/Dryer is self-draining, splashfree. **$19.98** ($4.50) #A1520.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 121 EL ; P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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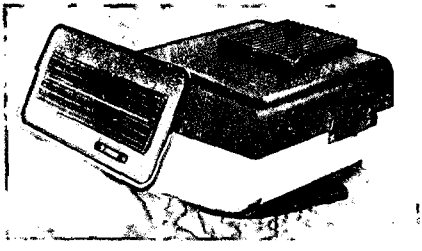
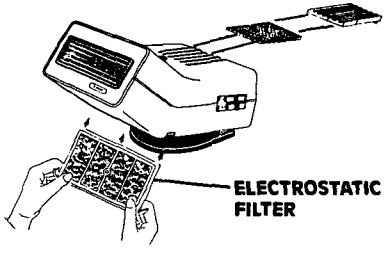
▼ BREATHE EASIER WITH THE AIR PROCESSOR

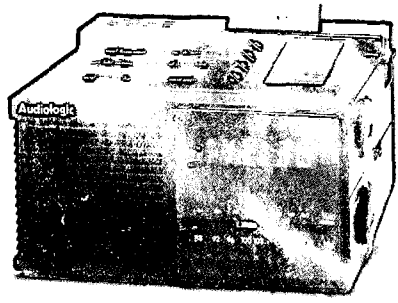
Clean air is vital to overall good health and general well-being and there is growing concern about the quality of the air around us. Amcor's Air Processor is uniquely designed to remove indoor air pollution and improve air quality. This compact unit has a high voltage generator that produces negatively charged ions that clean the air of cigarette/cigar smoke, dust, pollen, fungal and bacterial particles as well as a host of other allergy stimuli. The Air Processor also features a blower for air circulation and a unique filter that is permanent and washable. Includes a free Ionoscope that detects the negative ions emitted from the ion generator and proves that it is functioning. Very quiet so it is perfect for any room in your house. UL listed. **$99.98** ($6.50) #A2002.





ELECTROSTATIC FILTER

▼ SLEEP SOUNDLY WITH SOUND SLEEPER



Is noise pollution interfering with your ability to get a good night's sleep? If so, then the Sound Sleeper by Audiologic is the clock radio of your dreams. Sound Sleeper combines a state of the art AM/FM cassette clock radio with the benefits of natural sound conditioning. Sound Sleeper lets you fall asleep to the sounds of ocean surf, rushing waterfalls and/or rainfall with the flip of a switch. After a relaxing night's sleep, wake up with a buzzer or music from the radio or cassette. So why have an ordinary clock radio when you can have the cassette clock radio that not only wakes you up but also lulls you to sleep! **$89.98** ($5.50) #A2000.

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